



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



32101 063693475

3869
93
387

Library of



Princeton University.

from the bequest of

Dr. Theodore M. Hunt, '65

STEPHEN DUGARD.

VOL. II.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY SAMUEL BENTLEY,
Bangor House, Shoe Lane.

STEPHEN DUGARD.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"FIVE KNIGHTS OF ST. ALBANS," ETC.

W. Musford

Go where thou wilt — I see
The wildness of thy fate draws to an end —
To a bad, fearful end !

FORD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1840.

STEPHEN DUGARD.

CHAPTER I.

Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgment,
And see the way to merit, clearly see it.
A true deserver like a diamond sparkles ;
In darkness you may see him, that 's in absense,
Which is the greatest darkness falls on love.

The Changeling.

It was *before* the events recorded in the preceding chapter took place, that Aston had positively fixed the day for his departure. Would it be fair, then, to accuse him of caprice, and of not knowing his own mind, because, *after* they had taken place, he suffered that beautiful June morning, which has been described, to pass over, instead of rejoicing to think he had got such fine weather for his journey? At the same time, as he was now more than ever anxious to pay his respects

to his father, he made serious preparations for visiting London the ensuing week.

And what were Arabella's meditations when, hurrying from the presence of Aston, she sought the solitude of her own chamber? Not quite of so philosophical a character as those which occupied his mind; but to the full as bewildering. She did not, even in the silence of her own thoughts, venture to consider what had passed as a declaration of love exactly; but then, she could not help feeling a little proud at having gained, without knowing it, without consciously seeking it, the esteem, the admiration, the praise, of one who was esteemed, admired, and praised by all. It seemed to throw around herself, as it were, some portion of his excellence.

Unquestionably, there was more of that tempered exultation in her feelings which belongs to the consciousness of being *preferred*, than of those deeper and more thrilling emotions which disturb a young heart, when first it kindles with the thought of being *beloved*. Yet hers was a heart to love calmly, but enduringly : calmly

in the beginning, enduringly after ; though scarcely capable, under any circumstances, of engendering that fervid passion which creates its idol,—then worships its creation !

Neither Sir Everton nor Lady Frances deemed it expedient to have any conversation with her concerning Aston's proposal, till it should be known what were the sentiments of his father upon the subject : while Aston, whatever might have been his inclinations, had no opportunity, for Arabella studiously avoided being left alone with him. Indeed, there was now a visible embarrassment in their deportment, which Cameron, who seemed to delight in making them feel that he was master of their secret thoughts, occasionally aggravated by certain impertinent nods and winks. This ambiguous state became, at last, so irksome to Aston, (who had lost the careless freedom of a friend, in the anxious solitudes of an expectant lover,) that he grew really impatient to be released from it. Even Arabella fancied she should be more comfortable, somehow or other, when he was gone ; and yet,

when he did go, it was not very long before she began to fancy she should be still more comfortable when he came back again.

The day preceding his actual departure they were agreeably surprised by an unexpected visit from General Neville, accompanied by his son.

"I have not come," said the General, when he was alone with Sir Everton, "to fulfill my promise of passing a week with you, as we must return to Gloucester to-morrow; but in compliance with the suggestion of Dr. M'Nevin."

He then proceeded to state, that having accidentally mentioned to the Doctor the circumstances of Bertha Azledine's strong personal resemblance to the hapless Bertha Neville, as well as the identity of name, the sagacious physician immediately discerned all the possible benefit of an interview, when his patient was sufficiently restored to bear the experiment, provided it were judiciously managed. He therefore gave the General a few leading instructions as to the best way of con-

ducting it, particularly enjoining him to take care Miss Azledine's *name* was not pronounced in his presence, till the effect of her appearance upon him had been fully ascertained; "for," said he, "in the yet fragile state of his mind, it is necessary to contrive, with the utmost circumspection and delicacy, all the circumstances by which he is surrounded."

It may easily be imagined how much additional interest was thrown round this visit of Charles Neville, when its specific object was made known to the rest of the family. Bertha alone (at the suggestion of Aston) was kept in ignorance of it, lest her deportment should betray an anxiety and agitation dangerous to the morbidly sensitive state of Mr. Neville's feelings.

He seemed to be perfectly restored; but there was something in his general manner and appearance deeply, yet painfully interesting, even to those who knew nothing of his calamitous history. In person he was tall, and in his carriage, dignified and sedate. His features were finely moulded, while his

modulated voice took its tones with rapid fidelity from the impulse of whatever emotions affected him at the moment. Grief, hopeless Grief, had stamped her very image upon him ; with every look, with every movement, her likeness was incorporated ; not because his cheek was pale, or his eye mournful, or that involuntary sighs would burst from him ; these her more common denotements, passed almost unheeded ; it was the visible presence of that misery which dwelt silently within him, whose marked intensity made it impossible but that the most churlish must have seen in it the index to a heart so withered, that no one spring of hope or gladness seemed to have its source there.

Aston had been walking with him round the grounds, and when they returned to the library, where the General was in conversation with Sir Everton and Lady Frances, he drew his father aside and said something to him in a whisper. " It is impossible, my dear Charles," replied the General, loud enough to be heard, " you must be mistaken." He per-

sisted he was right ; and manifesting some irritation at being contradicted, his father yielded the point. It afterwards appeared, he had recognised Aston as a person in whose company he had been before, though he could not recall either time, or place, or the occasion.

He had been introduced to every one except Arabella and Bertha ; and it was arranged that when they assembled for dinner, they should be in the room with the rest of the family, before the entrance of himself and the General, who was then to introduce them merely as the daughters of Sir Everton. This was accordingly done, and Bertha's back being towards the light at the time, he had but an imperfect view of her person or features.

Immediately after, Aston engaged him in discourse, but while they were conversing Bertha spoke to her brother. Mr. Neville fixed his eyes upon Aston, with an expression than which words could not have more plainly asked, " what voice is that ? " Then, casting a slow, shrinking look upwards, as if he

both expected and feared to see the being to whom it belonged, his eyes rested again upon Aston; but their expression was now changed to disappointment.

“Is it not very strange!” he muttered to himself.

Aston did not appear to notice his perturbation; and he abruptly resumed the conversation like a person who, suddenly roused from a fit of momentary abstraction, takes up the previous matter of his thoughts. The whole had passed unobserved by all except Aston.

At dinner he was seated between the General and Caroline, Bertha occupying a place on the same side of the table next to Sir Everton. No doubt she would have talked as much as usual during the repast; but either by design or accident, the conversation turned entirely upon war and politics, two subjects upon which ladies in general, and young ladies in particular, show their discretion by listening. She pouted, however, twice or thrice at Cameron, who sat opposite; and this was

nearly as great a relief, as if she had rated him for not talking about something she could understand.

Mr. Neville joined freely in the conversation, his observations being frequently remarkable for the same caustic terseness that characterised his incoherent dialogue with Aston and Cameron on the road. His mind was evidently of a vigorous quality; everything he said smacked of the raciness of the soil.

CHAPTER II.

Can my imagination work me so much ill,
That I may credit this for truth, and still
Believe mine eyes?

The Faithful Shepherdess.

THE day had been sultry ; but, as the sun declined, the evening came on with delicious coolness, and it was agreed to take tea in the open air. Chairs and tables were accordingly placed upon the lawn fronting the south, in which direction a bold and variegated landscape stretched before the eye.

Here they were soon joined by the ladies, and as Bertha, leaning on the arm of Caroline, came slowly along, her auburn hair flung back by the wind, and her expressive features bathed in the glowing rays of a setting sun, which shone full upon them, she looked like some

wood-nymph wandering from her shady haunts. Her whole appearance finely and powerfully contrasted with the pale countenance, dejected air, and downcast eyes of Miss Bagot.

Mr. Neville was advancing to meet them, when he suddenly stopped, and raising his hand to his brow, as though to shade his eyes from the reflected beams of the sun, he riveted them upon Bertha. It was a moment of intense anxiety to all, save the unconscious cause; but even she felt some of the emotion which she saw so vividly expressed in every countenance.

There was imminent danger in allowing the spell to work upon his kindling imagination. Reason and phrenetic ecstasy hung trembling in the balance: in one moment, his heated brain might have transformed into a vision of the dead the living resemblance that stood before him.

“Miss Azledine,” said the General, stepping hastily up to Bertha, and leading her to Charles, “allow me the pleasure of introducing you a second time to my son;—

Charles," he continued, "Miss Azledine will do you the honour of accepting your arm, while I conduct her Ladyship to the tea-table."

Still gazing in profound silence, but without any marked perturbation of manner, he offered Bertha his arm with an air of well-bred ease. Timid and confused, partly from fear, partly from the embarrassment natural to the situation in which she found herself, she accepted it. He no sooner felt the gentle touch of her hand, however, than he started; thus plainly demonstrating what shape his thoughts were beginning to assume. But this evidence was more strongly afforded, when, the next moment, bending down his head, he exclaimed in a whisper, "Speak!"

Bertha looked up. Her mild blue eyes met his piercing glance; an enchanting smile, which irradiated her countenance, seemed to ask, "What shall I say?" when he again exclaimed, with extreme agitation, "Speak! that smile, those eyes, and *voiceless* too, will undo me else!"

Bertha became alarmed for herself; the rest were still more alarmed for Mr. Neville, whose mind was rapidly yielding to a delusion, the existence of which might be followed by the most distressing consequences; when Aston, with a well-counterfeited air of easy gaiety, addressed Bertha.

“Miss Azledine, I have a very serious question to ask you; will you answer it?”

“Certainly,” said Bertha.

“Pray, what is the reason you are so confident in the *silent* power of your beauty this evening, that you refuse to weaken its enchantment by letting Mr. Neville hear how well you can sometimes talk—nonsense?”

“I think *you* talk very great nonsense,” answered Bertha, “to go on in that ridiculous manner.”

“You see,” continued Aston, turning to Mr. Neville, and laughing as he spoke, “what a contradiction these women are! Tell them they only talk nonsense when they speak, and they speak immediately, to confirm the truth in

denying it. Praise them for the eloquent wisdom that falls from their lips, and they become as silent as the bird of wisdom itself, for no other end than to assert their prerogative of having a will contrary to what should be their will."

Mr. Neville smiled at this playful raillery, but continued to look earnestly at Bertha. The rising emotions, which had awakened so much alarm, had been subdued at once by hearing her speak; though, at the sound of her voice a convulsive shivering seemed, for an instant, to seize his whole frame, occasioned by its strong resemblance to that of his own ill-starred Bertha; a resemblance which will be found uniformly to prevail wherever there is a marked similitude of feature and of general aspect between two persons.

It was consolatory, however, to observe, that he now appeared to contemplate Bertha Azledine only as he would have gazed upon a portrait of his lost Bertha; an auspicious change in the workings of his fancy, to be ascribed wholly to the prompt interference

of Aston ; for the former was so agitated, that instead of speaking, she would probably have fainted, had he not come to her relief. How fearfully *such* a circumstance might have operated upon the imagination of Mr. Neville, by recalling the moment when he saw *his* Bertha senseless in the arms of the buccaneer, may easily be conceived.

The check thus adroitly given was successfully followed up by the rest ; and he found himself insensibly drawn into conversation while walking up and down, with Bertha still leaning on his arm. At length they took their seats, Charles placing himself silently by her side. His restless eyes, however, wandered over her whole person with that look of inquisitive delight with which we survey the form and features of one whose name renown has made familiar, but in whose presence we find ourselves for the first time.

A braid of her hair, which the wind had disordered, hung over her shoulder. He gently replaced it. While the glossy curl rested for a moment in his hand, he gazed upon it ; then

letting it drop, fixed his eyes upon a diamond ring he wore, which contained a lock of his wife's hair. A smile of pleased surprise passed faintly over his face as he perceived they were alike in colour.

Aston, who felt a deep interest in his every look and movement (for they unfolded a volume where he read strange mysteries of the human mind), incessantly strove to withdraw him from himself. It was a considerable time, however, before either he or the others could do more than obtain a few brief words in reply to direct questions, after the uttering of which, all his thoughts seemed to revert to Bertha, from whom his eyes were scarcely withdrawn even while speaking. The fair object of this mute devotion would have felt more embarrassed than she did, had she not remembered what General Neville said at his first visit. She understood the cause of her attraction, and almost believed Mr. Neville gazed at her so passionately *only* because she resembled one who was as beautiful as herself. She certainly did not forget Bertha Neville's

“mild blue eyes, dimpled chin, and soft voice;” and the recollection of them was a sort of mirror, wherein she beheld Bertha Azledine.

The evening gradually stole away ; the last golden tints of the setting sun had faded from the shifting edges of a belt of western clouds, that shaped themselves fantastically into massy groups of battlements and rocky heights, while the streaks of a sapphire and emerald-coloured sky between, looked like the translucent bosom of some ocean bay, fringed by its yellow sands ; and the grey twilight which followed had imperceptibly veiled in partial obscurity the forms and countenances of the little circle. By the impulse of a common feeling, there were pauses in the conversation, as if to greet with calm musings of the spirit the coming on of this silent, solemn hour. In one of these pauses Mr. Neville suddenly addressed Aston.

“Mr. Aston,” said he, “answer me this. Twelve men go into a fever ward, and only one of the twelve shall catch the infection and die. What does this prove?”

“I should think,” replied Aston, wondering

at the drift of the question, "it would merely prove that he who died had a predisposition to febrile infection, which the other eleven were without."

"The very conclusion of my own mind," rejoined Mr. Neville. "And so, twelve men shall lose their wives, and one of the twelve go mad! What then? It is only the lurking principle of insanity brought into action by an exciting cause of sufficient magnitude. Any *other* cause, of equal magnitude, would have dragged it into existence; while, no such cause occurring, your lunatic goes to his grave undiscovered."

The consternation caused by this abrupt allusion to his own situation was indescribable. Aston alone saw in it the proof that he was able to *reason* upon that situation, and that, in fact, he had been doing so, in such a way as to account for it upon an hypothesis the plausibility of which could not be denied. He, too, was alone prepared, at the moment, to close with him in his argument, and carry his mind forward to the conclusions at which it aimed,

without dwelling upon the individual case that had suggested it.

“ We are mere children,” said he, “ in the knowledge of ourselves, and unable to comprehend the workings of the simplest part of our animal or moral machinery. We see effects, but grope for causes in the dark. He were a greater philosopher than Aristotle, Descartes, or Newton, who could *truly* expound *this* petty miracle,” and he picked up a small pebble, which he threw to some distance from him. “ I know what the schoolmen would tell me ; but who shall make me *comprehend* the lightning-like course of my intention, my will to execute it, the exercise of that will—upon my body, to stoop, my fingers to grasp, and my arm to fling from me that stone,—the whole series of operations performed in far less time than I have taken to describe them ? We are living mysteries ourselves ! — The world, and all that is in it, are mysteries ! And the shadows we pursue, from the cradle to the grave, compared with what we shall know beyond the grave, are as worthless as the many-coloured shells which a

child gathers on the sea shore. *They* teach not the wonders of the deep, nor tell of the mighty empires, and mightier regions yet untrod by man, which its rolling waters beat against ; and we, who are but pilgrims, treading, as it were, the margin, the narrow edge of boundless and invisible space, in this our journey through the short day of human life, amuse ourselves with the shells which lie in *our* path."

"Ay — the grave !" exclaimed Mr. Neville, in a sort of half soliloquy. "The grave ! the grave ! We call it the dark grave ; but it is there all light begins, and all darkness ends. Death ! its purveyor. Proud, remorseless king ! In what shape will *he* appear ? and whither shall we flee ? Into what strange climate ? What shall we be ? How shall we act ? What wonders shall we see ? What scenes, what worlds, will then be opened to our view ! You are right, Mr. Aston, we walk among shadows."

"It is proper we should so consider them," observed Sir Everton, "in reference to that

hereafter for which we are ordained : but it would be neither good philosophy nor rational piety to hold in contempt what, after all, is, and must be, the chief business of our lives while we are permitted to live. It is no less an error to undervalue the world, than inordinately to prize it. He who does the former contravenes, or rather renounces, the ends for which he is created ; and the latter debases them."

" It is a very good world," said the General, " abuse it as you will. And the best proof that we all like it is, that though we come into it without our consent, we grow so fond of it that I believe death would wait long enough for any of us, if he waited till *we* said we were willing to go out of it."

" And yet it is both sad and strange," remarked Mr. Neville, " that as we know we must go, and are only ignorant when, we should dislike to think of departing, and delay our preparation. This would be rational enough, if, by so doing, we could continue. But as we cannot, methinks it were more rational to be ready for the journey."

“Miss Azledine desires me to say,” interrupted Aston, “that she is dying to talk herself, but makes it a rule never to speak during the sermon.”

Arabella protested she had not opened her lips to Mr. Aston, and that she was delighted with the conversation.

“I dare say you are,” observed Cameron, “for you and Aston have been in very earnest discourse for the last ten minutes.”

There was not sufficient light to discern in Arabella’s countenance the crimson witness to the truth of this teasing retort; but her “for shame!” and Aston’s “never mind him,” were sufficient evidence. The General denounced him as a spy, and declared if there were ladies enough present to form a court-martial, he would bring him to trial.

A long pause ensued. There is no way so certain of stopping conversation altogether as by a tacit or expressed agreement to talk to the purpose. Every one immediately begins to consider what is to the purpose; but it is a long time before any one has confidence to announce that

he has made the discovery. Aston's interruption of the grave subject they were discussing was from an anxiety to direct the current of Mr. Neville's thoughts into a more cheerful and lively channel ; but he had accomplished only half his object. In the hope of accomplishing the other, he committed himself gaily to chance for success. Why he should just then hit upon such a topic *might* be explained, perhaps, upon that principle of moral philosophy which treats of the association of ideas.

"I have often wondered," said he, with an assumed air of profound sagacity, "how it is that handsome women are so much longer in getting husbands than they who are less handsome. I divide the sex, you perceive, into two classes only, — the handsome and the *less* handsome; for as to an absolutely ugly woman, there may be such a thing in some remote or hitherto undiscovered region of the globe, but it is a *rara avis in terra*, — I never saw one myself. I say, then, how is it that the most handsome, they who are first in beauty, are so commonly the last in making the best use of their beauty ? "

“And pray,” said Sir Everton, “what do you call making the best use of their beauty?”

“I have told you,” replied Aston, “making a husband of a lover.”

“Your reasons, sir?” said Mr. Neville, smiling.

“As thus,” continued Aston. “Everything in nature is applied to its best use, when it is applied to that for which nature intended it. Now the intention of beauty is ‘to cry havoc!’ at us defenceless men. Conquest is its end, its final cause; and conquest implies submission; and submission, implicit obedience —.”

“And implicit obedience,” interrupted Arabella, “implies a husband. I like your doctrine exceedingly.”

“Is not that what logicians would call a *non sequitur*?” said the General.

“No,” replied Aston, “it is only a misnomer.”

“Or an erratum, to be corrected thus,” observed Mr. Neville: “for ‘husband,’ read ‘wife.’ But your question remains unanswered.

I resolve the difficulty by a simple process. Your handsome woman is already wedded to her own beauty ; and, till she be divorced from her first husband, she can listen to no proposal from a second. Ay ; and be assured the incense of *self*-idolatry is more grateful to a vain heart and weak head, than the most fervent adoration of worshipers whose devotion can never have the same singleness of feeling. And yet I knew a peerless creature once, incomparably endowed with all rare perfections of mind and body, but so modestly accounting them in her own esteem, that her humility was the richest blazon of their matchless worth ! You are that peerless creature's fair copy," he continued, turning to Bertha, and addressing her in a voice of thrilling tenderness ; "and shall I dare to doubt, that where the shrine is like, so are the sainted virtues it enfolds ?"

" Charles !" exclaimed the General—

He paused for a moment ; then rising from his seat, advanced towards his son, and taking him by the hand, continued—

" Charles, I think it will be a pleasure to

you to know, that this young lady, whose resemblance to *your* Bertha is so striking, is her *namesake*, too, Miss Bertha Azledine !”

He withdrew his hand from his father's, and passing it across his eyes, to brush away some tears that had started, calmly replied, “ My heart called her by that name, the first moment I beheld her ; but my lips could not pronounce it. How wonderful ! — that nature, framing two so nearly alike, chance should complete her design, and hallow her work, by bestowing a similitude of name !”

The moon, which had been casting a chequered light upon the lawn, through a cluster of venerable oaks, now ascended above their lofty branches, and threw her soft, melancholy light upon the features of Bertha, which beamed with an expression of gentle sympathy, inspired by Mr. Neville's words and manner. He gazed long and earnestly at her, but without betraying any violent agitation. His father still stood by his side ; the rest had slowly and silently gathered in an anxious group round them. At length, turning towards the

General, tears glistening in his eyes, and a smile of mingled sadness and delight playing across his countenance, he exclaimed dejectedly—

“Look! Did you ever see such a likeness? Were she but a little taller, might I not believe that she who only visits me in dreams now, had descended from heaven in her own once living form, and sat before me? O God! that it were real! and I could say it is she, and not her image!”

They were all deeply affected by this scene, but the General most of all; for his voice betrayed the emotion he felt as he replied, again taking hold of his son's hand—

“I loved your *mother*, Charles, as tenderly, I think I may say, as you did Bertha, and I often thought, when first I lost her, what a consolation I could find in one who *resembled* her; in hearing a voice *like* that I could hear no more—”

“Hush!” interrupted Mr. Neville. “*She* died in your arms, and you wept tears at her grave, and there is a place you can visit, where

her dust is entombed. But where does my Bertha lie? Can I go to *her* grave? Can I kneel, and weep, and know that my tears fall upon the earth which covers *her*, and will one day cover *me*? Ah, no! *I* cannot go down to the bottom of the great waters, and find her! I cannot bend my steps along the pathless waves, to the spot where she sunk, and say, here is her resting-place!"

"Nay, but reason with your loss as a bereavement only," said Aston, in a tone of heart-felt pity, "and do not let the manner of it afflict you more than the loss itself."

"Why, so I do, sir!" he replied, with a look of supplicating misery, as if he thought Aston meant to rebuke his weakness. "You see I do not weep, and I hardly sigh; for to say the truth, I sometimes think she will come again. But till she does, this, her almost perfect image, shall be herself, and I will call *you* (addressing Miss Azledine) *my* Bertha; and you shall see what comfort it will be to me to look upon those soft, blue eyes, to listen to that softer voice, and teach you to

braid those silken tresses, as Bertha Neville's were, upon *her* alabaster brow."

"And if I have any skill in reading hearts," observed Aston, "by that tell-tale part of us, the face, I see now, in Miss Azledine's, the mute but eloquent expression of a generous desire to be that comfort to you."

Bertha smiled through tears she could not restrain; and Mr. Neville, taking her hand, pressed it to his lips, with an air at once so dignified, so gentle, so respectful, so fraught with pure and sacred feeling, that the act, trivial as it was in itself, seemed like a covenant of future peace and hope to his troubled spirit. Nor was it the semblance merely of such a compact; for, as if there were some healing magic in the name, some secret antidote to sorrow in the likeness, he grew more composed, and evinced less disposition to make every topic of discourse minister to the diseased bias of his thoughts.

It was evident, too, from his subsequent conversation with Bertha, the subjects he introduced, and the questions he asked, that he

was now seeking to discover in how many qualities of the mind she resembled his own Bertha; what sentiments, what feelings, she possessed in common with her. That her replies sometimes touched a chord which vibrated to his very soul, and made the illusion almost reality, was equally evident from the eager looks he would fix upon her, as if to be assured it was only such another being, and not the same, and from his impassioned acquiescence in what she said, as though, for a moment, his heart denied the illusion and yielded to the reality.

Bertha herself sustained her singular trial with a simplicity and gentleness, which greatly increased the effect of her fascination upon the sensitive temperament of Mr. Neville; till at length the summons to the supper-parlour partially relieved her from a situation, which had been attended with the most gratifying results to the general and his friends.

CHAPTER III.

I pray you take me into some grace among you : I had two mates that were both hanged for robbery, if that will serve your turn ; and a brave cut-purse to my cousin-german ; if kindred will be taken, I am as near akin to a thief as any of you that had fathers and mothers.

MIDDLETON'S "*More Dissemblers besides Women.*"

THE next morning, General Neville, his son, and Aston, quitted Azledine Hall together ; Aston consenting willingly to extend his journey, by taking Gloucester in his way, for the sake of the agreeable company he should thus have during the first day.

There was nothing very remarkable in his parting with Arabella ; for except that he shook hands twice with her, and only once with all the rest, and that each time there was a sort of lingering separation of fingers,

and that his "farewell" to her sounded rather differently from his farewell to the others, and that their eyes encountered with a peculiar kind of look as he at last hurried himself away after shaking hands the second time, and that Arabella stood at the window longer than any one else, because there was a part of the road visible from it, which Aston could not reasonably be expected to reach in less than five minutes,—except we say, in these trifling circumstances, there was nothing remarkable in their parting: nothing which denoted that either of them cared one jot more about it, than Aston himself might be supposed to care for leaving his friend Cameron, or his friend's interesting family.

And here, while Aston is journeying to London, and while events are ripening for our pen at Azledine Hall, we deem it a proper occasion to return to Black Rock, where other events, destined to have an unexpected influence upon the former, were also rapidly maturing themselves. But, as a suitable introduction to them, we must be allowed to make

a few profound reflections, which we promise shall be worthy the reader's serious meditation.

"We know what we are, but know not what we may be !" exclaims the beauteous Ophelia. In misfortunes, as in crimes, the mind adapts itself wonderfully and fearfully to their gradual encroachments. From the heights of prosperity, or virtue, we descend, step by step, to the depths of adversity or guilt ; when, if the last step could be as clearly discerned as the first, how few would have sufficient fortitude in the one case, or sufficient daring in the other ?

Take, for example, the man of thousands, whose embarrassments demand partial sacrifices. He makes them ; sustained by the hope that they will avert the necessity of greater ones. Anon, he finds he must go yet a little further ; and the next sacrifices appear the less because they are contrasted, not with his original situation, but with the one immediately preceding. Then come others ; and they too are veiled for him by the same delusive comparison ; till at last, the poor broken bank-

rupt sees himself stripped of *all*, wonders how he has borne reverses so calamitous, and exclaims in bitterness of truth and anguish, that could he have foreseen them, he would rather have died at once. But he was not required to make the descent by a single leap. He passed from the sunny heights of fortune to the bleak abodes of poverty, gradually weaned from the enjoyment of all things by the successive surrender of each particular enjoyment, that made up his sum of all.

And just so it fares with him who treads the miserable paths of vice. There is a pang which marks the first outrage to virtue that is never felt a second time; no, not though the whole catalogue of crime be run through; for the horror and remorse which pursue guilt in its deepening enormities, are its avenging punishments, and have no affinity with the struggling shame of violated innocence; the sharp, intolerable upbraidings of conscience, when it tells us, *we are no longer innocent!*

Who that has ever ventured to play with

the danger of sin, but would flee from it in horror, if a prophetic mirror could be held before his eyes, prefiguring its youth, manhood, and death? The citadel of our moral nature is never taken by storm. Its defences are mastered one by one; its foundations are slowly undermined; its strongholds are surrendered in succession. Each new crime borrows an excuse from the one that went before, and lends confidence to that which follows. Every step we take facilitates our onward course, while it builds a wall behind us, to obstruct our return. It shuts us out from the paradise we have renounced; but, alas! it does not hide from our view its radiant loveliness and its peaceful felicity; its paths of pleasantness, and all its forfeited delights!

The situation of Stephen resembled that which we have here described. The transition from apathy to approbation, and from approbation to practice, is easy. He who can witness vice without feeling the shock it gives to virtue, has but one step to make; as he who applauds a sordid action wants but opportunity to imitate

what he applauds. He has already committed it in his heart.

Nichol Ramsay, to whom was delegated the office of preceptor in this college of profligacy, aided by the occasional lessons of Kilvert and the rest, soon made such a flattering report of his pupil's progress, that he was admitted to the degree of a licentiate by the unanimous vote of the whole body, though it was some time before he was allowed to set up for himself.

It was during his probationary studies, and while he was daily passing many hours in the society of Three-Farthing Nick (who gained prodigiously on his affections), that he learned the precise nature of the occupation of himself and his associates, as well as the local history of the dwelling they inhabited.

The reader need hardly be informed, we apprehend, that they were a gang of smugglers, of whom Kilvert was the acknowledged head. Their number, at present, consisted of seven, including their newly-returned leader; but, as the hangman was constantly making demands

upon their little circle, volunteers were freely enrolled, after due precautions to ascertain that they were good men and true.

Kilvert had been singularly fortunate; for though he had a long arrear with the gallows, he had always contrived to postpone his payment, while so many of his followers had discharged theirs, that the gang, with the exception of Ramsay, had twice renewed its numbers since he first assumed the command. It was now upon rather a reduced establishment, as its usual complement varied between a dozen and a dozen and a half.

Their illicit traffic consisted chiefly in running French brandies and Dutch spirits; but they were not particular: contraband of every description being hazarded in turn. Neither did they confine their enterprises to the perilous trade of defrauding the revenue. They were a sort of amphibious freebooters, a marauding land excursion being as much in their way as a smuggling cruise. Hence, they were the terror of the surrounding country, and the cry of "Kilvert's boys are coming," was a

signal for general consternation among the inhabitants of the remote villages and hamlets scattered along the coast.

Their habitation, which was singularly well adapted, both by art and nature, for carrying on their lawless pursuits, stood upon the summit of an insulated rock in one of the wildest parts of the Sussex coast, surrounded by craggy heights of still greater altitude. The level space on which it was built, formed a deep hollow, enclosed within a natural parapet or breast-work, composed of projecting elevations of the rock itself, so that any one standing on the adjacent heights could not obtain a view of this lonely and sequestered abode, which was discernible only to the wild sea-fowl that flew screaming over its dilapidated walls. For what purpose, by whom, or when, they were first constructed, there existed no tradition.

By land, there was no approach, and its solitary entrance from the beach has already been described. Both the "Black Rock's Mouth," as it was called, and the steep, nar-

row defile nicknamed, "The Devil's Throat," seemed to have been the work of nature; the latter, perhaps, fretted away by some spring or ocean current, in ages far back, when the sea flowed many a fathom deep, over the summit of the rock. At flood time, the tide rose so high as nearly to conceal this entrance; but at ebb, it was visible, though only in one direction, towards the south, and looking merely like a small chasm or fissure, instead of a complete passage.

It might be supposed that a retreat so inaccessible, except for a few hours in each four-and-twenty, would be considered sufficiently secure. But fear is the shadow of guilt, and besides the secret pass-words, by which alone they who were out could enter, there were several barrels of gunpowder constantly kept in a cellar beneath, communicating with each other by well-laid trains, which were to be fired should it ever happen that they found themselves assailed by a force too strong to vanquish. And there were at least three among them bold enough to do this deed:

Kilvert himself, another of the gang named Black Kenneth, and that paragon of her sex, Jennet M'Blee.

As to Kilvert, though, as he was accustomed to say of himself, "I have carried my life in my hand these many years, knowing not how soon it may be demanded of me, and wishing to be ready whenever it is," he had pledged his soul to deeply-sworn oaths that no rope should ever be twisted for his neck, nor any gallows erected from which he could not ride away. These were no empty boastings. He had given proofs of what he would dare to do, when daring was all he had to trust to; especially on one occasion, well remembered, and often spoken of, by his associates.

He was engaged in a fray with a body of custom-house officers; but finding his situation desperate, he put spurs to his horse, and rode off. They fired. One of their balls went clean through his shoulder. Still he kept his seat, continued his flight, and saw himself closely pursued by two of them. Being better mounted, they soon gained upon

him ; but lest they should fire again, and bring him from his saddle, (for he was not sure they had discharged their only remaining pistols, though he strongly suspected as much,) he suddenly stopped, turned, and coolly waited their approach. Deceived by this apparent surrender, they rode up, one on each side, to make their capture, when, drawing a brace of pistols from his belt, he levelled his extended arms, and shot them both dead upon the spot. Then, wounded and bleeding as he was, he made his escape, leaving the two slaughtered men to teach a lesson to their companions who were approaching at full gallop. They took it ; for they did not attempt to continue the pursuit.

It has been said that the gang, at present, consisted of seven only. With one of them, Three-Farthing Nick, the reader has already been made acquainted. A brief account of the remaining five must suffice.

Kenneth Hossack, or "Black Kenneth" as he was commonly called, on account of his swarthy hue, had formerly belonged to a for-

midable gang of gipsies, who infested the county of Kent. Whether he was really a legitimate scion of that fortune-telling, farm-yard-robbing, and erratic tribe, born under a hedge, and reared upon a common, or whether he matriculated himself of the fraternity from a natural aversion to brick and mortar, is more than we can take upon ourselves to determine; but he certainly had all the outward marks of lawful descent. He was a tall, athletic, and most ruffianly-looking vagabond, of such thews and sinews, that once when the parish beadle, assisted by the whole *posse comitatús*, succeeded in dragging him to the stocks, he was no sooner left to his meditations than he wrenched off the padlock, liberated himself, and by way of trophy, decamped with the stocks themselves on his brawny shoulders.

He became one of "Kilvert boys," under the following circumstances. Wishing to eschew the haunts of men, he had been wandering along the beach from sunrise; when, tempted by its cool and sequestered appear-

ance, he sought shelter from a sultry harvest noon in the entrance to Black Rock, which he chanced to approach at a time when it was accessible. Here, lulled by the murmur of the distant waves, or overcome with fatigue, he fell asleep, and in that situation was discovered by Kilvert, Three-Farthing Nick, and two others, as they were descending by the Devil's Throat.

Their first common impulse was to despatch him at once; and in each hand a pistol was instantly grasped to execute this intention. One of the four was already in the act of cautiously advancing near enough to make sure of his aim, when Kilvert, reflecting that if any boat or vessel chanced to be off that point, the report of fire-arms, reverberating among the rocks, might betray their haunt, commanded his follower to stop.

It was then resolved to blind-fold him, and conduct him back to the house, where, if it should still be thought necessary, the deed of blood might be more quietly performed. This plan was immediately carried into execution,

and Kenneth, much wondering into what hands he had fallen, but suspecting they were no friendly ones, fought so desperately, that it gave even the sturdy four, who had hold of him by the arms and legs, sufficient work to haul him up the Devil's Throat. However, they succeeded in dragging him into their den; when there, they held a consultation as to what they should do next.

This agreeable conference was carried on in the hearing of Kenneth, who, when he found that the only point of contention among his unknown, and as yet, unseen friends, was whether he should be strangled, or have his brains blown out, thought it time to say something about himself. He told them who he was, what he was, how he came into the place where he had been discovered, and above all, (as he had no reason to suppose he was making a confession that would shock those who heard it,) *why* he had sought such a retired spot. This last intelligence operated prodigiously in his favour; and Kilvert, putting several questions, the answers to which soon

convinced him he had too many good qualities to be disregarded by persons every way so competent to appreciate their value, his life was spared, though Jennet, in the fulness of her wolfish nature, pleaded like a fiend against the decision.

The oath of fidelity was administered to him the next day in the following manner. A live rabbit was brought into the room, which Jennet killed by cutting its throat, catching the blood in a wooden bowl. With this she traced a circle on the floor, and in the middle of it placed a Bible, upon which Kenneth was commanded to kneel. Then, the rabbit being given to him, he was farther commanded to tear it limb from limb, repeating as he rent it, these words, "May the devil tear *my* limbs thus, if ever I discover anything I do, or see done by others, or anything I know, that can harm them!" He was next ordered to eat the heart of the rabbit, warm, raw, and bleeding, and say, "if ever I do discover anything done by myself, or by others, or anything I know that can harm them, may the next bit I

eat be my perdition, as I pray this heart may be, if I am now false in my own heart!" These horrible imprecations finished, half a pint of brandy was given him, which he was to drink off at a draught, a ceremony he performed with right good will; after which, he shook hands with the whole of them, beginning with Kilvert and ending with Jennet. From this moment he was considered a sworn brother of the gang.

The names of the remaining four, were Gabriel Langley, Grim Lawrence, Bli Gonzalez, and Mat Henwick.

Gabriel Langley had been bred to the sea; was now between thirty and forty; blind of one eye, (the sight of which he lost when a lad, from the blow of a hatchet, thrown at him by his father, by way of gentle remonstrance for an act of disobedience,) and farther distinguished by a blue anchor, tattooed upon his right cheek, with a small death's head of the same colour, admirably executed on his left. When cruising off the coast of Africa, on board a King's ship, he engaged in a mutiny, for which he was

sent home with several others, to take his trial. But before the court-martial assembled, he contrived to effect his escape, by jumping overboard, and swimming upwards of three miles to the shore. From that time, Gabriel conceived an aversion to His Majesty's service. He was both an expert and daring navigator; and being the only one whose nautical education was derived from a regular sea-faring life, his skill and intrepidity had not only often proved of essential service in critical situations, but had given him a degree of authority in those matters, which not even Kilvert felt inclined to dispute.

Of Grim Lawrence, it is enough to mention that he had been a smuggler for thirty years, and an outlawed one, for fifteen. He had had so much to do with custom-house officers, that he was supposed to know when they were near, as a blood-hound scents a human footstep. Like Kilvert, he was a sworn enemy to hemp and timber, always declaring they might hang him *after* he was dead, if they liked; but that he would never *die* upon a

gibbet. He acquired the name of *Grim Lawrence*, from always looking ferociously solemn in his cups; and as he was hardly ever sober, his features had no opportunity of relaxing.

Bli Gonzalez, as his surname implied, was of foreign extraction. He was a Spaniard by birth, and born of reputable parents, at Alicante, who had him carefully educated for the church. No doubt a great deal of excellent learning, and much school divinity, was thrown away. He was a good Catholic, however, and wore a metal cross round his neck, to which he addressed his prayers whenever he was about to do anything that foreboded more than ordinary jeopardy. He carried, also, the ivory image of a saint in his breeches pocket; and when they were in a storm, sang *Ave Maris Stella* to our Lady, like a nightingale. He made it a rule never to rob on a Friday; always observing a strict fast on that day. Nor did he fail to avail himself of the benefit of confession, as often as he visited the French coast, and had time to seek a priest, from whom he could obtain

the comfort of absolution. But his main reliance for escaping all dangers, except those of his lawless calling, was upon a charm or amulet, sowed up in a piece of parchment. This he would sometimes show to his companions, upon condition they did not scoff at it. It consisted of the following inscription, printed upon a square bit of vellum, with a leaden effigy of the crucifixion attached to it by a black ribbon :—

Sancti tres reges,
Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar,
Orate pro nobis, nunc et in horâ
Mortis nostræ.

Ces billets ont touché aux trois têtes de
S. S. Rois à Cologne.

Ils sont pour des voyageurs, contre les malheurs de chemins,
Maux de tête, mal caduque, fièvres, sorcellerie,
Toute sorte de maléfice et mort subite.

Mat Henwick had nothing about him, but what he shared with every villain who stakes his life upon desperate chances. He was a common-place cut-throat ; a mere linsey-woolsey rogue ; willing enough to have a hand in any mischief that might spite a world with

which he had quarrelled, and abide the consequence, be it whipping, imprisonment, transportation or hanging. He was one of those who, "in the catalogue go for men," but had no "particular addition from the bill that writes them all alike," no "station in the file."

Such were now the associates of Stephen ; and by the time he had been theirs for two months, during which he had been allowed to make as many trips to Holland, and one to France, he had imbibed a thorough taste for their bold and hardy occupation. His twenty guineas were spent in equipping him with a handsome cutlass, a brace of silver-mounted pistols, and such articles of apparel as were suitable to his new calling. No flaxen-headed urchin, when first he abjures petticoats, and sees himself a tiny man, encased in breeches, ever felt more delight than did Stephen when he belted himself for the reception of his pistols, slung his cutlass, mounted his sea boots, and buttoned on his blue frieze coat.

Nor was the besetting sin of our miserable

nature, vanity, so dormant in him, as not to kindle, as he noted that all *his* appointments were of a more costly quality than those of his fellows. He was a smuggler, but a gentleman smuggler; while the common mode of addressing him continued to be the same as Kilvert first employed, — “the 'Squire.” What a humble thing pride is! It can crawl as well as soar — lick the dust as well as scale heaven — and feed upon offal as well as riot in ambrosia! He was no less gratified by being installed, with certain mock ceremonies, in the office of Kilvert’s Lieutenant, which he regarded as a flattering promotion in the service.

CHAPTER IV.

Excess of love can work such miracles !

MASSINGER.

THUS matters stood, when intelligence reached Black Rock that Andrew Mayfield might be expected there in the course of a few weeks. This was welcome news to all, except Jennet ; but especially so to Stephen, who had not heard from Andrew since he left Ashbourne, though he had frequently written to him, and was at a loss to account for his silence. His perplexity would have been spared, had he known that Kilvert, to whom he entrusted his letters to put into the post, always put them into the fire, pursuant to an article in the secret treaty between himself and Mayfield ; for there might have been danger in any

communication from him arriving at Ashbourne.

His feelings towards Andrew had undergone no change ; and in addition to the desire of seeing him, which they inspired, there was now the wish of appearing before him as Kilvert's lieutenant ; as one who had exchanged the rustic ambition of single-stick for the more stirring exploits of the smuggler. He longed to exhibit his proficiency in all the arts taught at the college of the *Devil's Throat*, and hoped to surprise him by the display.

But while he was anticipating these triumphs, others awaited him, which he neither anticipated nor desired. Jennet M'Blee had begun to look upon him with an eye of love. It was even so ! With all the fickle levity of her sex ("Frailty, thy name is woman !") the she-Caliban had cooled towards Ellic, and warmed towards Stephen.

It often happens that we are the last to discover what it concerns us to be the first to know ; and thus it was with Stephen, into whose imagination it never once entered

that he had made a conquest of Jennet. But his companions had long suspected the mischief he was doing. A thousand tender assiduities were now lavished upon him which had hitherto been reserved for Kilvert, to say nothing of as many more which sprang new-born from her virgin passion. Sometimes, when smoking, involuntary sighs would half strangle her; at others, the same "windy suspiration of forced breath" would send the pungent atoms of titillating dust, which she held in her fingers, into her eyes. These, with such glances as Mrs. Page employed in examining Falstaff's parts—speaking looks that told love's silent thoughts—were frequently matters of merry observation to all, except Stephen, by whom they were all unobserved. Two little novelties, indeed, he *did* notice; *viz.* that Jennet had latterly contrived always to place herself next him at table, and that at such times she would poke her knees against his, or tread, as gently as she could, with her jack-boots upon his toes. Nevertheless, he was slow to read the true meaning of these amorous tokens.

One morning, however, when she caught him alone, the fatal secret came out.

He was polishing the silver mountings of his pistols; and Jennet, seating herself by his side, laid her hand upon his with an air of sweet confusion.

"I have been thinking, Master Stephen," said she, "that these white fingers would grace a golden ring; and, see! here is one (I hardly know how I came by it, but I have had it a many years), which I am sure will just fit this dainty. Let me try it on."

The next moment, he saw the little finger of his left hand encircled by a thick gold ring, on which was inscribed this poesy: "God for *me* appointed *thee*."

"Thank you, Jennet," said Stephen. "I'll wear it for your sake."

"Oh, the hoky! will you? Then it is not the only thing you shall wear for my sake. Look here. I have a pair of bright silver clasps, too, to fasten your belt with, which will look better than that nasty brass buckle. And see, Master Stephen, they are in the shape of a

heart a-bleeding with a Cupid's arrow through the middle. How smart you'll look !”

“ I shall, Jennet,” replied Stephen, whose vanity was tickled with this finery. “ I shall, and I'm much obliged to you.”

“ Oh, you are quite welcome,” answered the love-sick girl, “ to anything *I* have; for I think you a deserving young gentleman as knows how to behave himself, which is more than some of our fellows do.”

Stephen made no reply to this compliment, but sat examining his gifts. There was a pause of two or three minutes, at the end of which Jennet resumed.

“ How do you like your bed ?”

“ Very much,” answered Stephen.

“ I don't know what's come to me,” she continued, “ *I* can't get a wink of sleep at night, but lie thinking and thinking, till it is time to get up, and then I am as drowsy as an owl.”

“ And what do you think of, Jennet? Your pipe ?”

“ My pipe ! I couldn't smoke the finest pipe

in England. God forgive me ! I've been a sinful creature. But, thank the Lord, I am beginning to feel myself clean an altered woman."

" You are not growing pious, I hope," replied Stephen, laughing.

" Heaven forbid !" exclaimed Jennet, emphatically. " But I'm growing chaste, Master Stephen, and that's what our sex *should* be ; what every woman *ought* to be, who has proper notions. Please God, I'll leave off fuddling ; for when a woman loses her head, Master Stephen, how can she take care of anything else ?"

" Very true, Jennet ; yet a warm noggin going to bed is a comfortable night-cap, after all."

" So it is !" she replied, smacking her lips, " but then you know, as the old song says—

One pint draws another in,
And that pint lights a pipe.

Hugh ! hugh ! I'm roudy this morning.
I used to sing that ballad as clear as a

lark. I'll have another try, hem! hugh!
hem!

Why should men dread a cannon bore
Yet boldly 'proach a pottle-pot?
That may fall short, shoot wide, or o'er,
But drinking is the surer shot.

But when, alas! men come to die
Of dropsy, jaundice, stone, and gout,
When the black reckoning draws nigh,
And life (before the bottle,) is out!

When restless conscience knocks within,
And in despair begins to bawl,
Death, like a drawer, then steps in,
And asketh,—gentlemen! d'ye call?

That's better. Heaven help me, I was a pretty little chick of seven years, when I first heard my poor father sing that song. God rest his worthy soul!—if he isn't alive."

"You can chant a bit, I see," said Stephen, not knowing exactly what to make of this extraordinary scene.

"I love a merry strain from my heart," she replied, "though now, a doleful ditty would suit me better."

"Why, what's the matter with you, Jennet? You seem to have something on your mind."

"*I have!*" said she, with great emphasis. "You have hit it: *I have* something on my mind."

"Out with it, then; for trouble's the lighter, they say, when it is uncorked."

"Do you know that Ellic is jealous?"

"Of what?"

"Of me."

Stephen, who knew Kilvert's opinions of Jennet, and knew they were not of that stuff out of which jealousy is wrought, could not help laughing aloud at this declaration.

"Damn your snickering!" exclaimed the offended damsel, bending her brows in sudden wrath. But she as suddenly unbent them, and continued, in more winning accents. "Can't *you* guess the cause?"

Stephen was frightened. For the first time he now suspected she was going to make love to *him*. However, looking as serious as he could, he assured her he was wholly unable

to guess any cause for Kilvert's jealousy, unless it sprung from a suspicion that Grim Lawrence was his rival.

"Grim Lawrence!" she repeated in a tone of superlative contempt. "The loblolly toss-pot! Why, he is fresh-drunk every night, and stale-drunk all the day. Arn't it yourself, Master Stephen?" and she nipped him by the ear as she spoke, with a wanton toying, which was the less agreeable, because her nip was like that of a lobster's claw.

At this moment, Kilvert, who had been down to the beach, to look out for one of their boats, returned, and rescued Stephen from his dilemma, while he was endeavouring to frame a suitable reply. Jennet growled a curse upon the unwelcome interruption, as she rose to go and open the door. Ere she went, however, she insisted upon a salute, in return for her gold ring and silver clasp: Stephen seemed reluctant; time was precious; so she ravished an embrace, stifling him all the time with villanous fumes of gin and garlic.

"The bashful boy!" she exclaimed, patting

his cheek after it was over; "I dare say he never kissed a woman before."

"I wish I may never kiss another," muttered Stephen to himself, wiping his lips, as she left the room, "if you are one."

CHAPTER V.

———Make account of me,
As of thy fellow : we are villains all.

Jew of Malta.

A FEW days after the time mentioned by Mayfield, he arrived at Black Rock, in company with his eldest daughter, Susan, a tall, plump country wench, about eighteen. It was a welcome surprise to Stephen, and not an unwelcome one to any, the lady of the house excepted, who, besides being unprepared, felt that her hitherto undisputed supremacy in domestic affairs, to say nothing of other apprehensions, was likely to be invaded. Kilvert, though he had kept his own counsel, had evidently been apprised of Andrew's intention, from the preparations he had made for

the accommodation of his daughter. As to Stephen he was overjoyed; especially when he found that Susan was to remain with them as long as her father did. She had been a sort of romping sweetheart of his at Ashbourne; and though no love had grown up between them, there was that prelude to it, which is so apt to take place when sturdy lads with the down of manhood on their chins, mingle palms and lips with country lasses, who have learned to blush at such innocent freedoms, and to hold a parley with their hearts as to their meaning.

Stephen had a world of questions to ask Mayfield, after their first cordial greetings were over, about Mr. Bosley, the good folks at Ashbourne, and the family at Azledine Hall. These inquiries were answered with prudent reserve by Andrew, or with a dexterous invention of various little circumstances calculated to convince Stephen that the step he had taken was justified, by the subsequently declared intention of Sir Everton, and irremediable, from his now implacable resentment.

Mayfield was an old friend of Kilvert's. Their acquaintance commenced when the former was in Paris, as the servant of Sir Hildebrand Azledine, and whither the latter had betaken himself till a certain prejudice subsided, of which he complained that he was the victim ; a prejudice which had been the cause of two of his acquaintances being hanged at Colchester, for the death of a Custom-house officer. Not knowing how far the delusion might extend, he thought it better to visit the French capital and live for a time in modest retirement.

At a subsequent period, and when Mayfield, after his return to England, commenced business in Worcester, Kilvert offered to supply him with various articles of merchandise at a price much below the market rate. But somehow or other prejudice began to be at work in Worcester, too : and Mayfield, like Kilvert, found it necessary to seek an asylum from persecution. This asylum Kilvert granted him at Black Rock, where, during the two years that he remained, he taught him the

maritime geography of the coast of Sussex. At length, believing the ill-natured things which had been said of him were forgotten, he relinquished navigation for agriculture, and became, as the reader knows, a rural tenant upon Sir Everton's estate in Herefordshire.

He did not forget his absent friend, however, for he frequently devoted a whole day to inditing a letter, which Kilvert, when he received it, could not always read, without the assistance of Roger Payne, the landlord of the "Fish out of Water," at Rowland's Castle; who was the only person entrusted with their secrets. If Ellic did not happen to be in that part of the country when these despatches arrived, they of necessity remained unanswered till he was; because mine host invariably officiated as his amanuensis in replying to them. Hence it sometimes happened that an epistle penned at Ashbourne in the summer, waited till Christmas for an answer.

It was about four years after Mayfield had turned farmer, that he was one evening both

surprised and delighted by a visit in the twilight from Kilvert. Mutual congratulations were exchanged; and Andrew, eager to return the hospitalities he had formerly received, pressed him to make a long stay. But it was with difficulty he prevailed upon him to remain that night; and when at last he consented, it was upon condition that he should be allowed to resume his journey at sunrise.

“Where was he going? And why such haste?” These were natural questions for Andrew to ask; and they were promptly answered. He was going—to rusticate for a few months among the Welsh mountains: and as for his haste,—why, another of those unaccountable prejudices which had heretofore constrained him to sojourn at Paris, now made it desirable that he should visit Wales. It was his native country; and as he must go somewhere to be safe from his enemies, he might as well go there. It happened, however, as in the former case, that though he was fortunate enough to escape the persecu-

tion himself, several of his friends fell victims to it at Tyburn.

He was on his return from Wales, and had diverged a little from the direct line of his journey to pass a day with Andrew, when it occurred to the latter that he would be the very best person to take charge of Stephen till he was able to assume that office himself. Kilvert, who was no stranger to Mayfield's plans, willingly consented ; but upon conditions which were secretly settled between them. And thus it was that the latter was enabled to execute one part of his design,—the removal of Stephen from Ashbourne.

So many years had elapsed since Mayfield sought refuge at Black Rock, that Kilvert, Three Farthing Nick, and Jennet, were the only persons among its present inmates who then belonged to the gang. Many affectionate inquiries were made after former friends, the pride of other days ; and many tender regrets breathed to the memory of those who were gone. There was a pathetic simplicity in the brief, melancholy responses which told of their

several fates. "Ah, poor fellow! *he* was hanged at last!"—"The venturesome fool! I told him how it would be, and so it turned out, for *he* is across the water."—"Ay, *his* was a short life, but a merry one: he put his foot into it the very first time; and now there are not two of his bones left to rattle against each other at Cesley Isle."—"Oh, Dick Cobby, you mean: God bless you! *he* has been gone I can't tell you how long: his skull was split with a broad axe, as clean as an apple, near the Fens at Milden Hall." In this way, with no other variation than mounting the ladder, visiting the plantations, or falling in some desperate conflict with revenue officers, were the various destinies of some score of departed friends commemorated.

Andrew, now that he had rejoined the gang, was no idle drone; and Stephen, who had known him only as a farmer, was surprised to observe his proficiency in all the arts of a smuggler; till he learned from Three Farthing Nick, that he had already served a tolerable apprenticeship to the trade. It was

a great comfort, however, to have him constantly by his side ; for he still looked up to him with something like filial respect, and Andrew still exercised that strange, undefinable influence which had enabled him to bring matters to their present bearing.

The situation of Susan, meanwhile, was equivocal, dangerous, and, to Stephen, inexplicable. He was pleased with her presence at Black Rock : but was it a place for anything in the shape of a woman, except such a heteroclite as Jennet ? Sometimes, in the course of conversation, he endeavoured to ascertain her own feelings upon the subject ; whether she was not afraid of associating with so lawless a crew, and what had induced her father to bring her there ? Susan, who had received her lesson, always replied, that she feared nothing so long as her father and Stephen were with her ; and moreover, that she preferred where she was, to a hum-drum country life, with nothing to do all the year round but spin, wash, feed the pigs, make bread, and brew beer.

One thing he was pleased to observe. She was as chary of her discourse and company to all save himself, as he himself could desire; and whether it was that her apparent simplicity awed them, or that her father's presence was a protection, or that they, too, had received their lesson, certain it is, they imposed upon themselves a restraint, which almost saved Susan the necessity of observing any herself. Indeed, she had not been long at Black Rock before she acquired the name of the "squire's lady;" and Stephen was accustomed to hear himself designated, in their rough, licentious phrase, as the "cockswain of the tight little yawl."

Her arrival, however, was a sad blow to the chaste and infant passion of Jenet, whose love, as is sometimes the case, grew stronger and stronger as it became more and more hopeless. She sighed in secret; but wished her sighs had the double power of kindling a flame in the heart of her idol, and withering the heart of her rival.

They alone who have loved, and know what it is to see the smile which should be theirs, light up the face at the approach of another, to hear the sigh which is breathed for the absent one, and to stand unheeded, while idolatrous looks stream from radiant eyes, worshipping and worshiped—they alone can comprehend what Jennet M'Blee endured after the arrival of Susan Mayfield.

She was always gaunt, but now she was a skeleton; she was always tawny, but now she became motley; black, green, and yellow; her temper was never gentle, but now it was a tornado. Finally, she who for Stephen's sake would have "grown chaste and left off fuddling," now (strange contradiction of human nature!) for the very same cause, fuddled more than ever, and let chastity take its chance. It was well for Susan, too, that Kilvert had not only an eye to penetrate the mystery of her altered manners, but a spirit fierce enough to make her own quail before it; else, it is too certain, she would have appeased her

raging appetite for vengeance by means familiar to her thoughts, and not abhorrent to her nature. As it was, she stifled the yearnings of her soul ; nay, sometimes fed upon the hope that it might still be possible to supplant the rival she feared to destroy.

CHAPTER VI.

So shall our sleeping vengeance now arise,
And smite with death thy hated enterprise.

Doctor Faustus.

THE reader, we dare say, has not forgotten Mayfield's second demand of a hundred pounds from Sir Everton, when the Baronet summoned his son Cameron to witness his refusal, and afterwards sent him out of the room that he might not witness his compliance. Andrew's emissary, on that occasion, was Black Kenneth; and the cause of his mission was as follows:—

There happened to be a serious defalcation in the exchequer at Black Rock, arising from two or three unsuccessful trips, and more especially from one or two unlucky seizures; or, which was nearly the same thing, from the necessity of making flotsion of their cargoes, in

consequence of the hot pursuit of the revenue cutters.

In one of the many debates which took place in the committee of ways and means, Andrew hinted that a hundred pounds or so might be had with little trouble, if they were in Herefordshire instead of Sussex. This led to a discussion, which ended in Black Kenneth's volunteering to make the required journey to Azledine Hall, which he accordingly did. Upon his return, Mayfield was highly amused with his account of the interview between himself and Sir Everton, more particularly with that part where he related how Squire Cameron was sent for, and how he was suddenly sent away again, upon the delivery of Mayfield's second letter. Kilvert, too, was loud in his applause of the ready invention displayed by Kenneth when the Baronet threatened to commit him.

"What if he had executed his threat?" he asked.

"I was alone with him," replied Black Kenneth significantly; pointing, as he spoke, to

the side pocket in which he carried his long knife.

“ Good !” said Kilvert, nodding his head in approbation ; while a shudder ran through the veins of Stephen. Even Andrew breathed quicker as he heard this sanguinary purpose avowed.

The money thus obtained was thrown into the common stock, and matters going a little more prosperously in their other affairs, they led a life of riotous jollity for several months. At length an event took place which, in its immediate consequences, occasioned a temporary suspension of the residence of Kilvert, Mayfield, Stephen, Three-Farthing Nick, and Black Kenneth, at Black Rock.

We must here observe, that when Kilvert called upon Andrew in his way to the Welsh mountains, he mentioned as one reason for his retirement, that some idle reports had got abroad respecting himself, in connexion with a daring robbery committed in open day, at the custom-house at Poole. It may also be remembered, that though Kilvert, by his timely

visit to Wales, escaped the vengeance of his persecutors, several of his friends fell victims to it. Since his return to Black Rock, he had again been a little disquieted upon the subject, by learning that another of his friends, one Ned Dymar, had lately been committed to Chichester gaol, charged with having been concerned in the said forcible entry into the Poole custom-house. This circumstance excited rather uneasy sensations among all the inmates of Black Rock, save Mayfield and Stephen.

One Sunday morning, when they were carousing at the "Fish out of Water," at Rowland's Castle, Roger Payne, the landlord, called Kilvert aside, and told him there were two men then in his house whom he knew to be upon their way to a neighbouring magistrate for the purpose of giving information against Dymar.

"Are they so?" said Kilvert, coolly. "I'll save them the trouble of finishing their journey."

He returned to his companions, and communicated the intelligence. Few arguments

were necessary to convince them that these men must be taken care of, for the present.

“ Hang the dogs ! ” exclaimed Stephen ;
“ they come to hang us . ”

“ Secure them first, and hang them after , ”
replied Mayfield.

While they were considering what would be the best plan for getting them into their power, the two men made their appearance in the yard, calling for their horses. They looked like farm servants, and wore short gaberdines.

“ By the goodness of Providence ! ” cried Mat Henwick, (who was very apt to take undue credit for the interest he had in heaven,) “ we are safe enough ! I know the stout one , ” he continued, stretching his neck over the shoulder of Bli Gonzalez ; “ his name is Ben—Ben Tapner, of Rook’s Hill, and carter to Squire Jackson. I’ll go out and speak to him ; we’ll then have them in to drink, and that will pave the way for anything else . ”

“ You are sure you know him ? ” said Kilvert.

"You shall see," replied Mat, and he left the room. The next moment, they saw him shaking hands with Ben, who seemed delighted at the meeting, and soon followed him into the house, along with his companion.

"And what has brought you into these parts?" said Mat, addressing his friend Ben, as he handed him a glass of brandy-and-water, whereof water was the less ingredient. "Are you still at Squire Jackson's?"

"Yes, I be," replied Ben.

"And where are you going?" continued Mat.

Ben's companion gave a sly tug at his gaberdyne, as much as to say "hold your tongue, you fool!" Ben put out his leg to intimate that he knew what he was about.

"Where be I going?" he repeated; "why, upon a job I don't half like; but I can't help myself. I say, Dick," turning to his friend—"this is Dick Rutherford, gentlemen, my fellow servant,—I say, Dick, what dost think? Hadn't we better be jogging?"

"Ay, sure," replied Dick, rising to go.

“Nay,” interrupted Mat Henwick, “by the goodness of Providence, you shall have another glass first. We havn’t met this many a day ; and it’s very hard if we can’t spare half an hour now we have, and on a Sunday, too. Come, I know Master Payne has some crack rum ; we’ll take a parting glass of that, and then go, and God speed you !”

Mat had a shrewd guess as to what would be the effect of mixing their liquor ; besides which, when he gave the order to Master Payne for *three* glasses of rum-and-water, it was accompanied by a look which let Roger know the exact strength he was to give to *two* of them. Kilvert, meanwhile, seconded Mat’s invitation, as did all the rest ; so, before the rum-and-water arrived, both Ben and Dick began to consider themselves in clover. Glass followed glass ; and Stephen could not help thinking of Jennet’s song—

“One pint draws another in
And that pint lights a pipe—”

Which was verified to the very letter. They

smoked, they drank, they laughed, they talked; betrayed all they were going to disclose; showed the letter, (which was in Dick's custody,) from a collector of customs at Southampton, to the justice who was to take their deposition; and at last, dropped from their seats, under the influence of the liquor with which they had been plied.

While in this state, a daring suggestion of Kilvert's was adopted. He proposed that they should both be tied on one horse, a sack thrown over them, and conveyed to Black Rock, there to be kept till the fate of Dymar was known. But first of all, the letter was taken out of Rutherford's pocket, and being found to confirm all the men had said, it was immediately burnt.

When this scheme was imparted to Roger Payne, he shook his head, insisted upon knowing nothing about it, and went to afternoon service, that he might be out of the way while it was executed. The ostler, who was left in charge of the house, said it was no business of his, when Gabriel Langley,

(handling his pistol as he spoke,) swore "he would blow out the brains of any man who mentioned what had happened."

"By the goodness of Providence," observed Mat Henwick, as they set forward with the two unfortunate witnesses, "by the goodness of Providence, we have got them safe enough."

"Hurrah for Black Rock!" roared Stephen, who could hardly sit his horse, and firing one of his pistols in the air.

Kilvert turned sharply round. He looked angrily at Stephen; but seeing his condition, rode up to him, drew the other pistol from his belt, and unclasping his hanger, gave them to Mayfield.

"You are drunk, squire," said he, "and may do mischief with these weapons. A fool's trick, like the one you have just committed, might prove the first link in a chain long enough to reach Black Rock."

Stephen attempted to snatch the pistol out of Mayfield's hand. Kilvert caught his arm, and dashed it from him with sufficient violence to unhorse the tottering rider.

“By the living God!” he exclaimed, drawing his cutlass, “I’ll strike you dead if you repeat this. I am not going to play my neck against your reeling head.”

Three-Farthing Nick and Andrew alighted, to assist Stephen to remount. He had received no hurt from his fall, and flustered as he was with drink, had sense enough to understand his situation. Once more in his saddle, he was contented to look fierce things, as he rode between Mayfield and Three-Farthing Nick; but said not a word; neither did any; for besides that they viewed Stephen’s drunken prank in the same light as Kilvert, they knew their leader for one who never threatened twice.

CHAPTER VII.

Elea. Where's Zarack? Where Baltazar?

What have you done with them?

Phil. They're gone to Pluto's kingdom, to provide

A place for thee, and to attend thee there.

MARLOWE'S *Lust's Dominion*.

THEY had proceeded about ten miles on their journey (Mat Henwick leading the horse on which the men were tied, and Grim Lawrence the one which Rutherford had ridden) when, arriving at the foot of a steep hill, they slackened their pace. Kilvert's temper was no longer ruffled; and Stephen's senses were returning, with only a faint recollection of what had taken place. As they were bandying jokes upon the lawfulness of their morning's work, in seizing notoriously contraband goods, and upon the surprise of the two countrymen when

they should discover into what hands they had fallen, they heard a loud sneeze from one of them, and then these words: "Dick, where be 'st thou? My belly 's as sore as a blain."

Kilvert, turning his eyes towards the horse, perceived large drops of blood falling copiously from beneath the sack with which the men were covered. He commanded his party to halt; and the covering being removed, the head and face of Rutherford appeared bathed in blood, which was streaming from his mouth, ears, and nose. At first, Ben was thought to be in the same plight, for his head hanging close to his companion's, had received a large portion of the effusion. But, upon examination, it turned out that it was not his own blood with which he was thus hideously besmeared. As to Rutherford, he was as defunct as any subject that ever lay under the dissecting knife. The pendulous position of his head, and the heavy jolting of the cart-horse over which he had been flung, had caused the rupture of a vessel on the brain; an accident the more likely to happen from their turgid and

inflamed state, owing to the liquor he had drunk ; though, truth to say, few brains could have been proof, like Ben's, against such a mode of travelling.

They immediately unbound them ; and setting Ben upright against a tree (for his stupor was still too great to permit of his understanding either his own situation or the fate of his companion), they began to debate upon the best means of disposing of the body. One obvious course was to bury it ; but they had no implements with them. It could not be left behind, concealed among the underwood, lest accident should lead to its discovery before it was decayed. Black Kenneth suggested, that they might cut it up with their knives, and scatter it on their journey, in such small pieces that detection would be impossible ; but this was rejected as a piece of unnecessary trouble. At length, Kilvert determined to proceed, and if they came to any cottage, or lone farmhouse, where they could safely procure a spade or two, well and good ; in that case they would bury it ; “ if not,” he added, “ we know there

is ground enough for a comfortable grave at Black Rock."

The body, therefore, was again strapped upon the horse, and the mouth, nose, and ears stuffed with long grass, to soak up the blood which still oozed from them. With respect to Ben, he was placed upon the other horse; but as he could not sit, to save the trouble of holding him, they tied his legs under, so that though he rocked backwards and forwards, he could not sway round.

Once more they set forward, Stephen and Mayfield a little qualmish about the business, but the rest laughing and joking as if it were only a fatted calf, fresh from the slaughterhouse, they were conveying along.

"By the goodness of Providence," observed Mat Henwick, "the ride has been of service to one of them."

"Ay," replied Gabriel Langley, in a surly tone, as if his thoughts were untuned, "and the rest of the journey, or something else, must do a like service for the other. He would

never die easier than now, when he does not know that he is alive."

"It would be a job well over," remarked Bli Gonzalez; "for if the lubber freshens up it will look more like murder."

"Look like the devil!" exclaimed Black Kenneth; "he'll never look so well for us as with his throat cut. For my own part, I would not hurt a worm; but self-defence is the first law of nature; and if my own father tried to hang me, wouldn't I try to hang him? To be sure I would; that's fair argument, all the world over. Do nobody no harm that seeks no harm, but have at everybody that does; that's my maxim, and damnation to him who is afraid to say the same."

"See how he lies," interrupted Grim Lawrence, "ready for the knife. Will anybody tell me, if I were just to make a small hole in that bit of tanned gristle below his beard, I should do an ill deed?"

The rest could not refrain from laughing at this cut-throat logic; and Three-Far-

thing Nick, addressing Grim Lawrence, observed, that, "if he *did* make the small hole, and the case should happen to come before a jury, he was afraid his own argument would be turned against himself, by a certain functionary of the law, who might say, will anybody tell me that merely putting a few inches of rope round this man's neck is doing him an injury?"

Kilvert, who had listened to this conversation without taking any part in it, now addressed them.

"You know, my lads," said he, "*I* am never for blood, when it can be avoided. It spoils a good cause, and makes a bad one worse. I have been thinking of the matter we have in hand. What is our situation? These men, as the squire said in the beginning, were going to hang us; and some of us know, from what they said when drunk, as well as from the contents of the letter we burned, they had it in their power to do so."

"By the goodness of Providence, they had," exclaimed Mat Henwick.

"It is true, we are safe," continued Kilvert, "and forewarned, we may perhaps, continue so. But what shall save our friend Ned Dymar? And what should we expect if he were in our place, and we in his?"

"Ay, what indeed?" said Black Kenneth.

"Honour towards a comrade, who is in limbo," pursued Kilvert, "and who, if he were a sneak, might bargain for his own neck at the price of ours, must not be overlooked."

"Certainly not," responded Gabriel Langley.

"Besides, we have ourselves to look to. One of the men is dead, by the visitation of God. (Bli Gonzalez kissed his metal crucifix.) That's all very well, you'll say, and so it is; but if the other lives to tell *his* story, will anybody believe *ours*? Will anybody believe he would have died, if we had left him alone? Well, then, now look at the other side of the question. What is the use of taking this one to Black Rock? We can never let him go; while we shall be constantly hagged with the fear of his escape. Upon my

honour, I don't see how we can help killing him."

"Kill him at once, captain, and talk about it afterwards," cried Grim Lawrence; "say but the word, and I am ready," half drawing his knife, as he spoke.

"Is it really necessary, do you think?" interposed Mayfield, who, as well as Stephen, shrunk from this terrible proposal. "Could not *some* plan be contrived, to avoid shedding blood?"

"It is all very well for you, Master Mayfield, and the young squire, there," interrupted Grim Lawrence, with a furious scowl, "to talk of other plans, and play the woman. *You* were not in the same boat with us, when the job took place at Poole, though you are now; so, if you please, we'll look after our own necks without asking your advice."

"I dare say," added Mat Henwick, "you would not be over nice about putting a fellow three feet under ground, or giving him the benefit of ten fathoms water, if by so doing

you could keep the gallows waiting a little longer for yourself."

"No, no," said Bli Gonzalez, "he would go to Rome, and hang the Pope at the altar, (crossing himself as he spoke,) rather than—"

—"Look at the halter which was to hang himself, you think, Bli," interrupted Kilvert. "But let us have no brawl. My friend Andrew means well enough, I know; only he does not see the ticklish situation in which we stand in its right light. However, we see it ourselves; and the upshot of the matter is, that Mat's crony must be provided with the bed that Adam made for Abel."

Stephen's cheek grew pale, and turning his eye upon Mayfield, he saw that he too was agitated; though, after the taunts he had received, he considered it useless to attempt farther expostulation. The rest received the decision of Kilvert with a loud hurrah!

The sanguinary resolution was no sooner taken, than the means of executing it were debated. Various methods were suggested,

and among them, one by Three-Farthing Nick : that a blunderbuss, which Gabriel Langley carried, should have a long string tied to the trigger, the muzzle held to the head of the intended victim, and then all to pull at the string so that every one might be equally concerned in the deed. But this was abandoned for a scheme of Kilvert's, who proposed that as they all had loaded pistols, one should be taken from each, laid in a heap on the ground, covered over, and every man blindfolded, draw that upon which he first laid his hand. Whoever *drew his own*, should despatch their prisoner. If no one drew his own, then he to whom the last one belonged, should be executioner. The object of both schemes was the same, that of common participation in the crime ; but the latter was preferred, because less difficult of performance, while it had besides, the recommendation of a chance of escape, which to some among them, exclusively of Stephen and Mayfield, was not undesired.

A turning of the road now brought them into a narrow, winding declivity, with high

banks on each side, overshadowed by lofty trees. This seemed a fit spot for their design; but while they were consulting whether to make it so, Kilvert's eye caught the glimpse of a wreath of blue smoke, curling between some elms; and looking more carefully, the tall, pointed gables of an old farm-house were partially visible through the branches. This discovery, while it put an end to their project, suggested the probability of being able to obtain by loan, or otherwise, one or more spades, and Three-Farthing Nick was despatched to reconnoitre.

With some difficulty he scrambled his way up the almost perpendicular bank, among the thick bushes which clothed its side. He succeeded, however, in gaining the top, and looking down at his companions, gave a nod, to signify there was a fair prospect of success.

He saw before him a substantial brick house, built in the style of the reign of Elizabeth, with barns, stables, rick-yards, a dairy, and other appurtenances. He looked cautiously round to see if he was observed; but there

was no appearance of any person being within. He advanced to the gate which opened into the fold-yard, and leaned over it, as if merely admiring its neat and clean condition. Taking another survey in every direction, and still seeing no one, he ventured on the other side, in quest of the object of his visit. He was not disappointed. In a shed, used for a wood-house, he saw sundry shovels lying about in tempting profusion. He made prize of two; retraced his steps unnoticed; and reaching the top of the bank, held them up in triumph for a moment, then casting them down into the road, quickly descended himself.

Thus provided with the means of shrouding from human eyes, as they hoped, the appalling evidence of their meditated crime, they proceeded gaily along. But Stephen's heart grew sick at the idea of what was about to be done, while Mayfield, in reality, cared less for the deed itself, than his own involuntary participation in it. The former silently resolved, should it be his lot, no power on earth should make him fulfil the stipulated condition; not

reflecting that if he refused, in all human probability his own life would be unhesitatingly sacrificed. Andrew, on the contrary, fully aware of this alternative, (for he knew some of the men he had to deal with, better than Stephen,) though sincerely hoping he might escape, was determined, if he did not, to go through with the business.

They continued their route till they came within five or six miles of Black Rock, and then entering a wood, of nearly two miles in extent, for the purpose of avoiding the main road, Kilvert ordered them to halt. The natural gloom of the place was increased by the approaching shadows of evening; and, to Stephen's imagination, by the work they had in hand.

"Here let it be done," said Kilvert.

Black Kenneth was the first to begin. Fastening his horse to a tree, he took one of the spades, and proceeded to dig in the spot pointed out by Kilvert. Grim Lawrence followed, and every one in turn, was called upon to lend a hand, Stephen and Mayfield relieving

Kilvert and Mat Henwick. In less than an hour, a grave of several feet deep was excavated; and into it the body of Rutherford was thrown, together with the bloody cloth which covered it. But now came the more terrific scene of this awful drama.

Kilvert, without speaking a word, (and the same profound silence was maintained by all,) collected the pistols, which he placed upon the ground, and then, taking off his own coat, spread it over them. They were laid completely out of sight, behind the mound of earth which had been thrown up in digging the grave.

“ Now,” said he, when everything was ready, “ it shall not be thought I have a better chance than the rest, as I mean to be the first to draw. Come here, squire,” beckoning to Stephen, who advanced with a faltering step. “ Let me bind this handkerchief over your eyes, and then Mayfield shall lead you to the pistols. Change the position of every one, but without lifting the coat, or putting your hand under it. You cannot then place your own where you can

find it again, nor can I know in what order they will lie."

This was accordingly done. After which, Kilvert, with his eyes bound, was conducted to the heap. He drew forth one, and stuck it in his belt. Stephen shook in every limb when it came to his turn. At length, there remained only the last; and then, upon examination, it was found that no one had drawn his own. Whose, then, was the last? Black Kenneth's. He took it up, cocked it, and went towards the miserable being whose very minutes were now counted.

"Stop!" exclaimed Kilvert. "Give him time to say his prayers, if he is able."

Poor wretch! He had slept away the fumes of the treacherous drink sufficiently to know all the horror of his situation; to know that his grave was yawning before him; and that he was on the brink of eternity. He awoke under the rough grasp of Kilvert, who untied the cords with which he was fastened, and stared wildly about him as he was dragged off the horse. The first word he uttered was the

name of his companion, friend, and fellow-servant.

"You are to die!" said Kilvert.

He had reeled before, as he endeavoured to gain his benumbed legs; but at these words he suddenly stiffened into an attitude of pallid horror. There was light enough to see the band by whom he was surrounded, and the dark grave at his feet, and the blood-besmeared features of his companion lying in it.

"I am here to die!" he exclaimed in a voice scarcely articulate. "For what?"

"It concerns you more to know that you *are* to die, than to know for what," replied Kilvert. "If a minute will bestead you, to send up a short prayer to Heaven, use it so; if not, prepare."

He dropped upon his knees, and with frantic gestures implored them to spare his life. At this moment, Bli Gonzalez approached behind, and, slashing his knife across his eyes, exclaimed, "Ned Dymar sends you that!" The shriek of the wretched man was frightful. He fell upon his face: when Black Kenneth

stepped up, dragged him close to the edge of the grave, supported him with one hand in a half-erect position, with the other directed the muzzle of the pistol close to his heart—fired—let go his hold, and the mangled body dropped upon that of Rutherford! Whether he was quite dead, they did not trouble themselves to ascertain. The next minute they set to work, and filled up the grave.

It was a scene fraught with horror. The shriek of the murdered man, as Gonzalez wantonly mutilated him—the startling echoes of the pistol shot through the surrounding forest—the heavy, sullen sound of the body as it rolled into the grave, and the stifled death-groan which faintly followed the ball that pierced the heart—still rung in the ears of Stephen, who had shrunk trembling behind Kilvert, unable to look at the bloody business. He felt he was a murderer! What that feeling is, in the freshness of its first awakening, there is no form of speech dark and terrible enough to express.

Even his comrades, inured as they were to

deeds like this, or at least, callous as they had proved themselves in its perpetration—even they, who had talked of it with so much levity, and pursued it with such an unrelenting spirit, were awed, for the moment, by its consummation. Not a word was spoken, after the brutal exclamation of Bli Gonzalez. In silence, Black Kenneth advanced to perform *his* task; in silence he dragged his bleeding victim to the edge of the grave; in silence they proceeded to shovel in the earth; and when, it came to Stephen's turn to assist, he was reminded of it by Kilvert, who touched his arm, and silently pointed to the spade which Mat. Henwick had left, standing upright in the mould. As if, too, to shed a preternatural horror over the scene, the evening which had closed in with a stormy sky, now became tempestuous. The thunder rolled at a distance; flashes of lightning cast a red and vivid glare, at intervals, upon the new-made grave; large drops of sultry rain rustled on the leaves of the trees, like the quick tread

of approaching steps; and the rising wind seemed to wail and sigh among the branches, as if a funeral dirge were being solemnly chaunted by the viewless spirits of the place.

At length they left the spot. The storm increased, and continued to do so, during the rest of their journey. A timid or a superstitious mind, haunted by its guilt, might have fancied the turmoil of the elements the angry voice of an offended God, speaking in dismal accents to the souls of those who had slain the innocent; who had "swallowed them up alive, as the grave; and whole, as they that go down into the pit."

Not such were their reflections, who now pursued their route through the scarcely discernible paths of the forest. Yet every turn of their winding track, as it increased the distance between them and the place of their crime, seemed to lighten the burthen of the crime itself; till at length Mat Henwick, raising his voice above the fury of the tempest, observed, with his accustomed phrase, that

"by the goodness of Providence, they would every one be drenched to the skin before they reached Black Rock."

"That is past all doubt," replied Grim Lawrence, "for it is already swash, swash, in the saddle with me. I shall be swabbed fore and aft, by the time we are out of this damned wood."

"It is a boisterous night," said Gabriel Langley, "and will make the timbers crack of many a good ship, if it continues to blow great guns in this way till morning."

"How far is it to Black Rock?" inquired Mayfield.

"Three long miles, after we get into smooth water," replied Gabriel.

"Which we shall soon do now," added Bli Gonzalez, "for we have just passed the hermitage where the old man was murdered, who had lived in it for thirty years. It was much such another night as this, when that job was done."

"You remember it?" said Three-Farthing Nick.

“ Yes;” replied Gonzalez.

“ How did it happen?”

“ Why, I’ll tell you. Some ten or twelve years ago, as I have heard——”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha !” exclaimed Black Kenneth.
“ I say, Bli, you were running on a lee shore, and made a sudden tack. Some ten or twelve years ago, as you have *heard* !—ha ! ha ! You forget what other folks have heard. But never mind, Bli, go on with your story ; I’ll be bound you’ll tell it as well as if you had seen all that happened.”

At this moment the whole firmament seemed to open, and one vast sheet of fire careered over it with a loud hissing noise. It was followed by a tremendous clap of thunder, which rebellowed again from every side. The horses reared, and became unmanageable, while, for an instant, the bright sulphurous flash, succeeded as it was by pitchy darkness, produced the same effect as if they had all been struck with sudden blindness. One of the horses belonging to the two unfortunate men, broke loose from the hand of Mat Henwick,

and dashed furiously into the thickest part of the forest. Mat began to laugh; but his unseasonable mirth was soon checked by Kilvert.

“Damnation!” he exclaimed, in a rage, bordering on frenzy; “do you know what you have done? Who has the other horse?”

“I have, Captain,” said Grim Lawrence.

“Give me the bridle,” he continued, riding up to him; “and stand off!”

Kilvert drew his pistol and shot it dead.

“Is it a thing to laugh at?” he added, turning fiercely round to Mat, “that you have let out of your hands the best proof of what has taken place? There will be a hue and cry after these men—that horse will be found; perhaps in this very forest—search will follow; and discovery be made. Here have I been racking my brains for the last half hour, how we might rid ourselves of these horses, and just when I had resolved to serve both as I have one, you must defeat all by this slippery trick, and laugh at it, too! Hell confound your mirth!”

"By the goodness of Providence," said Mat, surlily, "I could not help it; for, look here, I held by what I had; he has left half his bridle behind him."

"By the goodness of a well-twisted rope," rejoined Kilvert, in a tone of mingled contempt and anger, "it is more than an even chance you will one day have your reward for this."

The rest of the gang saw the possible peril of this mischance, and proposed to disperse themselves in different directions in search of the horse.

"Pooh!" cried Kilvert; "I fling a shilling down—there. Where is it? You shall as easily find that, in a night like this, as the devil which has kicked up his heels at us, and now roams at large in these tangled paths. But I'll tell you what *you* shall do," he continued, addressing himself to Mat with a stern voice; "to-morrow, at the first hour of ebb, you shall return hither, and narrowly search every foot of ground. I do not expect it will be of any use; however, it shall be done."

Mat signified his assent by growling out "very well," and again proceeding on their journey they were not long before they reached Black Rock, where, throwing off their wet garments, they sat down to supper, consisting of the meats which had been prepared for their dinner; for they had promised to be back by that time when they set forth in the morning.

Their appetites were as keen, and their conversation as boisterous, as if their hands had received no fresh stain of blood. Kilvert and Stephen, alone betrayed symptoms of harassed and agitated feelings; the former, from misgivings upon the subject of Mat's involuntary mishap, the latter, from a still feverish recollection of that day's miserable deed. The glass was freely plied; but drink, instead of lulling or stupifying his mental torture, only inflamed it.

Before they retired for the night, he fell asleep on one of the settles. Suddenly waking, he started up, and looking amazedly about him, exclaimed, "What have I been doing?"

"Snoring," said Kilvert, as he seized him

by the arm, and dragged him down again into his seat.

“What have I been doing?” he repeated in a voice of deeper anguish.

“To bed, Squire,” said Kilvert, “you are knocked up with your day’s work:” and he led him out of the room, followed by Mayfield.

Alas! his was no pillow of rest that night. Even when he slept, he still heard the shriek and the death-groan of the murdered; and in his dreams he still beheld their blood-stained forms.

CHAPTER VIII.

Black go in and black come out,
At thy going down we give thee a shout.

BEN JONSON.

DAYS and weeks passed, but all they heard about the two countrymen was, that their sudden disappearance had at first excited some stir; that at last it was concluded they had fallen into the hands of the smugglers; and that some settled it they were murdered, while others, believed they were only forcibly detained till the trial of Ned Dymar was over.

The inquiries set on foot had traced them to the "Fish out of Water," and both Roger Payne and his ostler had undergone several examinations. The former persisted he had left the men in his house when he went to church, and that they were gone when he re-

turned : the latter was as positive he got their horses ready for their departure, and that they actually departed ; but he could not any how recollect which road they took.

Kilvert, with the intrepid audacity which had so often carried him through perils of equal magnitude, made his appearance at the "Fish out of Water," during the hottest of the inquiry ; and even went so far as to declare *his* opinion that if the men had really received any foul play, there was no place so likely to be selected for it as the very forest in which they were actually buried ; well knowing that all who heard this opinion would give him credit for anything rather than the truth, and that if *he* advised them to go north, they would shrewdly infer they ought to go south.

It was long before Stephen regained his former state of mind. Indeed, he never entirely regained it ; but sunk into that moral lethargy which attends the progress of vice ; the paralysing conviction that, as the past is irrevocable, the future is not worth a struggle.

His situation, too, at Black Rock, had become otherwise uncomfortable enough, in consequence of a severe injury to his leg, occasioned by striking it against the fluke of an anchor, one dark night when they were off the Dutch coast. He was so crippled that he could not walk without assistance; while his cure was the more tedious, because necessarily left to nature alone, as no doctor could visit him.

For days together he was condemned to the solitude of Black Rock, relieved only by the society of Jennet and Susan. The former he could have dispensed with. Yet the creature was kind and attentive; but contrived to make her kindness the medium of so many demonstrations of her still enduring love, that Stephen suffered a martyrdom from her ogles and unsavoury sighs.

It was partly the effect of contrast, perhaps, that Susan's assiduities, during this period, made so powerful an impression. Certain it is, he began to find hitherto-undiscovered attractions in her company. She was con-

stantly with him; and without seeming to interfere with any one of the prerogatives so jealously asserted by Jennet, managed to bestow upon the invalid such proofs of anxiety for his situation, that he wondered he had never before noticed all her amiable qualities.

Love's work-shop is an idle brain. Hence it happened, that Stephen, having nothing else to think of while nursing his lame leg, incontinently fell in love with Susan; serious, downright love; plain and homely withal, but therefore the better suited to its object; for Susan, though young, and about as pretty as country girls generally are, (except in poetry and romance, where every dairý-maid is a "lovely young Lavinia,") had never carried her ideas beyond one sweetheart for courtship, and one husband for life.

This growing passion, gross and palpable as it was to all, could not escape the lynx-eyed jealousy of Jennet, who had never read *Paradise Lost*, and therefore knew nothing of what the Devil felt, when gazing upon the happiness of our original parents in Eden.

Had it been otherwise, had she been acquainted with Milton, unquestionably her feelings would have found vent in the language which he puts into the mouth of the arch fiend.

“Sight hateful! sight tormenting! Thus these two,
Imparadis’d in one another’s arms,
(The happier Eden!) shall enjoy their fill
Of bliss on bliss; while I, to Hell am thrust,
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among my other torments not the least,
Still unfulfilled with pain of longing, pines.”

It was not, however, till she one day actually caught them “imparadised in one another’s arms,” or, to speak in more sober phrase, till she surprised Stephen in the flagrant act of kissing Susan, with his arm scandalously twined round her waist, that she, being somewhat in her cups at the time, totally forgot all the native gentleness of her sex. Placing her own arms a-kimbo, and striding up to the dismayed girl, “Flesh and blood can’t bear this!” she exclaimed. “I’ll tell you what, Miss Mayfield, you are under a very great mistake, if you have come here with the notion that you may be unvirtuous:

I have seen enough of those things. I did not live three years with my god-mother for nothing. So please to recollect I know what you are about, and that it is as much for your good, as my own credit's sake, when I say there shall be none of these undescent doings at Black Rock."

Susan shrunk terrified and confused from this unlooked-for lecture upon morality, delivered as it was with the gestures of a bedlamite; but Stephen, who once trembled himself at the fierce virago, and who still liked anything better than crossing her fury, now felt a lion's heart in his bosom, when his mistress was at once insulted and alarmed. Besides, he was no longer what he had been. His mind was tuned to a different pitch by the rough quality of the life he had led; and above all, its present mood was harsh and jarring. He had seen, too, how Kilvert, and others of the gang, but especially Kilvert, tamed down the tigress when she was most fell; and Jennet had the full benefit of all these several circumstances. For, turning up-

on her, his eyes flashing fire, his cheek pale, and his lip quivering, he vollied forth oaths, menaces, revilings, and defiance, in such a torrent of picturesque language, winding up the whole with a well-applied thrust to her two shoulders, which sent her reeling to the other end of the room, that Jennet for once, if not daunted, found herself well-matched.

Daunted she certainly was not. Recovering her equilibrium, she snatched up a small hatchet, which chanced to be lying near, and with the contortions of a fiend, was about to rush upon her enemy, while imprecations too horrible to recite, vollied from her lips. Whether she would have taken vengeance upon her rival only, or whether, in the madness of rage, which liquor, jealousy, and revenge, equally inspired, she would have dealt her blows to fall where they might, it is impossible to say.

Stephen was still so far a cripple, that he could not move without the aid of a stick. But Susan, though shrinking with horror at the scene, had presence of mind to seize one of her lover's pistols, which hung on the wall,

and give it to him. He levelled it instantly at Jennet. She knew the fire-arms belonging to the gang were always kept loaded ; and Stephen swore if she did not drop the hatchet immediately, or if she advanced another step, he would send the ball whizzing through her brain. She stood for a moment, as if irresolute whether she would defy the worst ; but Stephen repeating his words, and placing his finger on the trigger, she threw the weapon from her, at the same time walking close up to him, as disdaining to be obedient in all things, saying, " You may fire and be damned ; but I 'll *not* stand just where you order me ! "

A long and fierce altercation ensued between the belligerents, in which it would be difficult to affirm who had the advantage. At length Jennet became so far appeased as to discuss calmly, and even pathetically, in her way, the sad cause of this intestine war.

Tutius est fictis contendere verbis,
Quam pugnare manu.

She insisted that Susan was an interloper ; that she had been brought to Black Rock

purposely to seduce Stephen's affections from herself, because she was a bit younger, though no better looking; that she had never smoked a comfortable pipe since the first hour of her coming, nor known what it was to be herself, except when a glass too much (which she abhorred) made her beside herself; and that she was sure Stephen must often hear her sigh in the night, as he slept in the next room to her's. Stephen endeavoured to console her; but she refused to be comforted.

"As for you, master Stephen," said she; and her eyes either filled with tears or ran over with liquor while she spoke; "as for you, I am not ashamed to confess I *do* love you; however, since it has come to this, and if you really mean never to return my love, I ask you, as a gentleman, whether you oughtn't to return my gold ring and silver clasp?"

"Certainly, Jennet," replied Stephen, "I can have no right to keep them, since, as you say, it has come to this."

He pulled off the ring, and gave it her, bidding Susan, at the same time, unfasten the clasp from his belt.

“Touch it if you dare!” exclaimed Jennet, all her former fury seeming to return, at this unequivocal proof that things had actually come to the pass she described. “Touch it if you dare, with your poisonous hands! And you,” she continued, addressing Stephen, “you will come to the gallows for this treatment of me. I know your fate, for I know your friends; ay, and I know your deeds. Mark me: that was a black Sunday, awhile ago, when you, and all of you, supped off your dinners.”

Susan knew not the meaning of her words; but Stephen heard a voice within which answered in accents that drove the colour from his cheek.

“For this ring,” she added, dashing it on the ground, and stamping upon it furiously till it was crushed flat, “that is all it is now worth to me. But do you remember the words it bore?”—and her countenance assumed a terrific expression. “Do you remember them, I say? Even as they made you mine, so shall the path you are treading make you the hang-

man's! '*God for me appointed thee.*' And there stands no gibbet in all England upon which *you* can look, and not read, '*Hell for me appointed thee.*' I tell you, I know your fate. The rope is round your neck; and if Andrew ever calls this blouze 'my lady,' you will mount the ladder a Sir, and an Azledine. But he must be careful, or the year that remains will cheat the twenty he has waited for."

With these words she quitted the room. Susan could not refrain from weeping. Stephen was silent, thoughtful, dismayed. He perceived Jennet had been told, by some of them, of the death of the witnesses; a circumstance not surprising; for she was of their council in all things; but not therefore the less disquieting to him, now that she was exasperated into an enemy, and his life, consequently, in her power. There was something, too, in her denunciations, and her manner of uttering them, which seemed to him prophetic. This, too, was not surprising; for a man who knows he deserves the gallows, easily believes any one inspired who tells him he will come to

it. But her concluding words perplexed him most. They had uplifted the curtain which concealed the future, and with the rapidity of thought his mind seized one glimpse which seemed to unfold all the yet unexplained mystery of Mayfield's conduct.

It was about a month after this desperate quarrel with Jennet (who from that day never once opened her lips either to himself or Susan), and when he had entirely recovered from his accident, though he had not yet resumed his going out with the gang, that he was awakened in the middle of the night by loud and repeated knockings at the door. Himself, Jennet, and Susan, were the only persons in the house. The knocking became more loud and vehement; and as he did not hear Jennet stirring, he arose with the intention of calling her. Before, however, he could reach her room, he found she had been roused, and was descending the stairs, muttering curses all the way upon the disturbers of her rest. He listened. The signals were passed; the door opened; and the voices of Kilvert, Mayfield, and the others

struck upon his ear. He hastily threw on his clothes and went down. The whole gang were returned, and seemed in great confusion.

"Where is Susan?" said Mayfield, seeing Stephen.

"In bed."

"Bid her dress herself instantly, get together a few things, and come down."

"What is the matter?"

"Ask no questions now," exclaimed Kilvert, impatiently, "but carry your message, and do the same yourself. We must away before dawn; and in two hours the sun will rise."

Stephen followed his instructions, while Kilvert, Mayfield, Black Kenneth, and Three-Farthing Nick, were running to and fro collecting such portable articles as belonged to them, and Jennet sat making a most dismal howling, in one corner of the room, till Grim Lawrence went up to her, and, with a gentle oath, bade her "stop blubbering, and rummage her lockers for as much provender and spirits as she could lay her hands on."

In less than half an hour they were all

assembled in the apartment below stairs, which was strewn with bundles, baskets, and packages of various descriptions. Still not a word was said by any one to explain the cause of this sudden and untimely movement ; but Kilvert, calling Grim Lawrence, Bli Gonzalez, Mat Henwick, and Gabriel Langley, each by his name, thus addressed them :—

“ You know the course I intend to steer, and you have my instructions. The danger *we* fly touches none of *you* at present ; nor do I think it will ; but should it, follow our example. Come where you will find hearts as true as those you bring, and we now leave behind. Remember the oath which binds us to each other. As we would all die for one, so let any one among us be prepared to die for all. Within these walls you are safe ; the only safety a brave man asks, the power of perishing with his enemy in a common death. Should you be tracked, hunted down by the bloodhounds of the law, may the coward who would leave one stone upon another of this our home and refuge, be shot like a mad dog, or die in a

ditch, like a poisoned rat !. For myself, I have weathered too many such storms to fear I shall founder in this. So cheer up, brave comrades ; and let us take a parting glass for ‘good b’ye,’ with another to our ‘next merry meeting.’”

Three deafening hurrahs followed this harangue ; and the parting glass having gone round, as well as the one in anticipation of their re-union, Kilvert shook hands with the four he was going to leave, and they with Andrew, Stephen, Black Kenneth, Three-Farthing Nick, and, last of all, the trembling and terrified Susan. Nor was Jennet forgotten, or likely to be ; for her grief was as audible as minute guns, and, like them, exploded at intervals.

Kilvert, to comfort her, gave her a kiss ; but no one else displayed the same hardihood. All the rest contented themselves with a farewell shake of the hand. When Mayfield offered her his, she looked at him with a malignant smile, and exclaimed, “I shall yet put a spoke in *your* wheel, long-headed as you reckon yourself.” To Stephen she said in a whisper, but with the

same expression of malice in her countenance, "Run—you only leave one end of the rope behind you—you'll find the other wherever you go." Susan hesitated to approach; but she beckoned her, and, taking her left hand, gazed at her earnestly, with something of wildness in her look, as she exclaimed, "When this finger wears a ring, remember mine!"

Everything was now ready for their departure; and Mat Henwick having kindled two torches, he and Bli Gonzalez led the way, the rest bearing baskets with provisions, kegs, and bottles of spirits, and such articles of property as they had hastily gathered together.

The scene, as they descended the *Devil's Throat*, was strikingly picturesque. The red glare of the torches flashed on the broken sides and top, now throwing into dusky shadows the forms and countenances of those in the rear,—now reflecting brightly upon those nearest the torch-bearers,—and now, as they approached the mouth, flinging long rays of dancing light upon the swelling waves that broke upon the beach, where one of their largest vessels was

moored. No time was lost in getting on board ; and the moment the things were stowed away, Kilvert ordered them to extinguish their torches. The next instant they were afloat ; and, as they pushed off, one farewell cheer greeted them from the shore.

CHAPTER IX.

Might not this beauty, tell me (it's a sweet one),
Without more setting off, as now it is,
Thanking no greater mistress than mere Nature,
Stagger a constant heart ?

The Double Marriage.

TURN we to gentler scenes and gentler beings. The guilty fugitives are upon the ocean, wandering to find a refuge from their fears. Ere we follow them in their flight, let us seek the repose of contemplating virtuous happiness, or give our sympathies to pure and generous natures struggling with undeserved misfortune.

Aston had departed upon a mission of joy. It was not long before he announced its success. Letters from him reached Azledine Hall, conveying, on the part of his father, those assurances which Sir Everton required as the preliminary to his formal recognition of him as

the suitor of Arabella ; and Arabella herself was made glad by receiving from her own father the welcome intelligence.

And now, for the first time, she unbosomed herself of the mighty secret to Caroline, who sincerely rejoiced with her. But though her joy was heartfelt, there was a sadness upon her spirit. This she would fain have concealed ; but the tears that swelled into her eyes were traitors to her wish. Still she resisted every entreaty to tell *why* she wept : because she would not dash with sorrow the new-born happiness of her friend.

The truth was, she had become more and more convinced of the propriety, nay, the necessity, of quitting Azledine Hall. *This* was her untold grief ; and it *was* a grief ; for, besides that she should lament her separation from Arabella and the family generally, she keenly felt the no longer equivocal change in the behaviour of Lady Frances and Sir Everton. In vain she endeavoured to account for the change ; in vain she severely reviewed and scrutinised her own conduct. She could disco-

ver nothing which presented to *her* mind an adequate reason for the change.

She was compelled, therefore, to ascribe it to caprice ; she could not endure to give it a more ungenerous origin. Meanwhile, her wounded feelings imparted an increasing reserve and despondency to her manner, which Lady Azledine at once imputed to the same cause as was operating, she knew, upon Cameron. This, while it heightened her anxiety for the adoption of immediate measures to check the assumed evil, heightened also the very estrangement of which Caroline secretly complained ; and thus were they mutually producing and reproducing jealousies and suspicions in profound ignorance of their own movements.

It was not long, however, before Caroline, with equal delicacy, firmness, and sincerity, expressed to Arabella her conviction that, for *some* cause or other, her presence at the Hall had ceased to be agreeable to Sir Everton and Lady Frances. In confirmation of this opinion, she recalled various circumstances to the recollection of her friend, besides mentioning others

till then unknown to her. Arabella, who could neither deny the one, nor extenuate the other, found herself without one plausible argument even by which she might hope to change the resolution of Caroline. Yet she shrunk from the idea of separation ; and begged hard to be permitted to speak to Lady Frances on the subject — a request which was haughtily denied ; for Caroline's pride was offended no less than her feelings, and she considered every hour she now remained as exposing her to the hazard of mortifications from the bare thought of which she recoiled.

But though forbidden to speak to Lady Frances, Arabella lay under no other prohibition, so she took the earliest opportunity of relating what had passed to her brother, who then discovered the full extent of his love for Miss Bagot. Lose her ! Part from her ! He felt it would be as easy to lay down life itself.

His first impulse was to seek his father, avow his passion, and abide the result. He could not be in a worse situation ; while it was

possible (what is impossible when hope and fear fill up the space between us and our desires?) paternal affection might triumph over mere worldly considerations. At any rate, if he must lose her, it would be more tolerable to do so with the knowledge of having striven to avoid it, than with the belief that *perhaps* it *might* have been avoided had he striven.

Further reflection, however, induced him to abandon this course, and to seek an interview with his mother. He fancied he possessed greater influence over her : and he knew if *she* could be brought to look indulgently upon his hopes, she would be able to facilitate his after-approaches to Sir Everton. Yet, when he remembered what had been repeatedly said by her upon the subject of his marriage, his heart misgave him. Besides, there was his own fixed determination never to degrade Caroline by consenting to seek her hand upon permission, yielded as a boon to himself, and condescension to her. His heart confessed her charms ; his mind her virtues ; and every feeling of his na-

ture proclaimed that where Heaven had bestowed this dowry, the "wealth of Ormus and of Ind" could not increase it.

Amid all this chivalrous homage, however, there mingled some of those earthlier passions which animate alike the peasant and the monarch, when the master passion itself is once enthroned. Although he believed he could bid his hopes be dumb, and himself patient; that he could live on in the mute worship of his idol, and the solitary blandishments of his cherished fealty, so he might see and hear his secret mistress, be covered by the same roof, breathe the same atmosphere, and be hourly conscious she was near; he felt he could *not* contemplate with fortitude the idea of absence, acuminated as it would be, in his case, by the denial of all those consolations which under other and happier circumstances would flow from mutual assurances of unchangeable affection, and reciprocal outpourings of tender regrets.

One thing, therefore, he did resolve upon,

and that was, to discourse with his mother ; not of himself, but of Caroline ; and to deplore (in the way of friendship merely) the existence of those causes which had determined her to leave Azledine Hall.

He instantly executed his design. Joining Lady Frances, who was walking on the lawn, without preface or circumlocution, he began :

“ I am sorry to hear Miss Bagot intends leaving us,” said he.

“ Indeed !” replied her ladyship, taking his arm. “ And why ?”

“ She fancies, I believe, that both you and Sir Everton wish it.”

“ Ridiculous !”

“ So *I* think ; and yet, in *her* situation it is natural she should have a thousand sensitive apprehensions about things which would pass unnoticed were her condition other than it is.”

“ And pray, what does Miss Bagot complain of ?” inquired Lady Azledine, somewhat haughtily.

Cameron noticed his mother's tone, and the calling her *Miss Bagot*, instead of *Caroline*, which was her usual custom.

"She does not *complain* of anything," he replied; "but she seems to *feel* many things."

"My dear Cameron," said her ladyship, in milder accents, "*I* am unconscious, and so I am sure, is your father, of any one thing, either said or done, which should offend Miss Bagot. At the same time, if she has taken it into her head, that there *has been*, I am quite aware she is consulting her own comfort by leaving us; for where that impression once exists, it can never be entirely removed."

"Oh, depend upon it," exclaimed Cameron, (rather more warmly, perhaps, than was absolutely necessary, in the way of mere friendship,) "depend upon it, Miss Bagot is too amiable, too gentle, too affectionate in disposition, to feel displeasure, much less resentment."

"Resentment!" repeated Lady Azledine, in her former haughty tone. "Really I have

yet to learn what right she has to feel resentment."

Cameron, vexed at having spoken so unguardedly, endeavoured to repair his error.

"The fault is mine, not hers," he replied :
" I have carelessly used expressions wholly inapplicable to her feelings. In fact, the matter is simply this: Miss Bagot imagines she has noticed of late, such an alteration in the deportment of yourself and Sir Everton, as, were it really so, could not be mistaken for anything less than a change in your sentiments towards her ; therefore she is preparing to adopt the only course that becomes her — a departure from the Hall."

"It appears then," said Lady Azledine, "you alone are in her confidence, for neither to me, nor to your father, has she announced any such intention. And yet I must be permitted to say, that when you talk of the *only* proper course which becomes her, it might have occurred to you, that a much more proper course would have been to have selected me for her confidence. Miss Bagot is under

my protection ; I consider myself responsible for her conduct while she is so ; and, I cannot but add, that in this instance, at least, her conduct has forfeited my approbation."

"For Heaven's sake !" exclaimed Cameron, "do not accuse her so unjustly. *I* have never exchanged one word with her upon the subject. She is ignorant even that I know of her intentions, or the feelings which have led to them. It was Arabella who mentioned them to me, and that solely because she was enjoined not to mention them to yourself."

"And why," interrupted Lady Azledine, "why was I to be so carefully excluded ? I disapprove of such childish mystery about trifles no less childish. It is not what I should have expected from the apparent candour and simplicity of Miss Bagot's character."

"Surely," rejoined Cameron, "you can be at no loss to understand the motives of her reluctance. A mind of less delicacy, a character of less sensibility, *would* have complained ; *would* have coarsely discussed the offence. But could *she* do so ? Could any one,

in her peculiar situation, unless devoid of all self-respect, of all self-dignity, come to you, and say, 'you look upon me coldly; your actions have lost their kindly aspect: your words their soothing gentleness; alter them, or I must go.' Such an appeal would be almost repulsive to the spirit of a menial; how then could it come from one like Miss Bagot?"

Lady Azledine was evidently touched by the vivid truth and generous purity of this expostulation, inspired less by love than the impulse of genuine manliness of character. It turned her eyes inward, and forced upon her a consciousness of the motives that had perverted her own naturally just disposition. Not that Cameron intended to rebuke his mother. What he had said, was less a defence of Caroline than of any and every person placed in Caroline's situation; and the implied censure was bestowed, not upon Lady Frances, towards whom his filial love and respect were unbounded, but upon any and every person capable of exacting the humiliating sacrifice he had stigmatised.

It was some time before she resumed the conversation, and they continued walking up and down the lawn, Cameron secretly congratulating himself upon a silence which he interpreted as an auspicious omen for his hopes. At length she spoke.

“When did this conversation take place between Miss Bagot and Arabella?”

“Yesterday, I believe; but it is scarcely an hour since my sister mentioned it to me; and I felt so much hurt at the idea of her leaving us for such a cause, that I could not refrain from speaking to you upon the subject.”

“I am still decidedly of opinion,” replied Lady Azledine, “that there is no alternative for Miss Bagot, in this unpleasant business, but to execute her intentions. She could no longer find our house the agreeable home it has hitherto been; and, knowing what I now do, I must frankly add, *I* could no longer find in *her* the same desirable inmate.”

“Might not a very few words,” observed Cameron, “remove all difficulties?”

"Who is to speak them? You have convinced me it would be harsh and indelicate to require them from Miss Bagot; and I presume *you* do not need to be convinced that your father and myself are at least entitled to equal consideration."

"If *I* might be allowed to enter into an explanation with her," replied Cameron, "authorised by you to assure her—"

"No, no, I will authorise nothing of the kind. But, whenever Miss Bagot thinks it necessary to acquaint me with her intended departure, I shall certainly feel it my duty to remove from her mind its present impressions in the most explicit and friendly manner. Meanwhile, let the business take its own course."

This was not the issue to satisfy Cameron; and impelled by the dread he had of an event which now seemed certain, he exclaimed,

"Is it not cruel to deal thus rigorously, with so meek, so unoffending a creature? One, too, who, when she goes hence, goes she knows not whither! An orphan, whose friendless

condition first prompted you to offer her 'an asylum, whose worth has since almost sanctified your sympathy, and whose exalted virtues adorn the circle she honours with her presence. It is cruel, by Heavens, it is! and I know, you will not let her go. Had she a father living, a mother — a brother — a sister—”

“Or an uncle!” said Lady Azledine, calmly. “Will not that satisfy your generous anxiety for her welfare?”

“Granted,” replied Cameron. “But what is that uncle? A stranger—as great a stranger to her as he is to ourselves, for his acquaintance with both began at the same time. Besides, he is a widower, and lives, I dare say, with that old fellow Humphrey, as he would if he were in camp, or doing garrison duty. The General is a fine character, and a pleasant companion; but no more fit to have the care of a delicate creature like Miss Bagot, than I should be to take the command of one of his brigades in battle. He could teach her nothing, but the manual exercise; and talk

to her about nothing but drums and trumpets, entering a breach, and storming a battery."

"My dear Cameron," said Lady Azledine, smiling, "I should be very happy to provide Miss Bagot with a better uncle, if I could : or with a mother, and half a dozen sisters ; but, as I really cannot, what is to be done ?"

"Keep her with us," he replied.

"How very inconsistent you are ! Just now you were quite eloquent, in demonstrating that she *could not* remain with us ; now, you require that she should. Remember, Miss Bagot, though young, is not a child—she is the mistress of her own will in determining her place of residence, and as she has declared her wish to leave the Hall, I know of no means—none, at least, which it would become either me or your father to employ, to alter that wish. So pray, let us waste no more words upon a subject, which really is not worth a tenth part of those we have already bestowed upon it."

Here the conversation terminated, so far as it related to Caroline. They continued their

walk, however, some time longer, discoursing upon various topics : among others upon the probable union of Aston with Arabella ; but the minds of both were occupied with a theme which engrossed more of their thoughts than the matters they talked about. At length they were joined by Sir Everton and Bertha, and Cameron soon after returned indoors, with the intention of retiring to his own apartment, for the benefit of a sulky meditation.

As he passed the half-open door of a small room, his eye caught a glimpse of Caroline, who was seated at the window. Her back was to him. He stopped and gazed. She was alone. Should he enter, or pass on ? While yet irresolute, he beheld her lift her handkerchief to her eyes. She was weeping ! What lover ever saw his mistress weep, and did not feel his own heart swell with grief, and with the impatient desire to know the source of such sacred tears ? Cameron was on the point of thus proving himself a lover, when some one gently tapped him on the

shoulder. It was Arabella. She had stepped gently behind him; and while her eyes silently met his, her finger was raised, with a reproving look that seemed to say, "for shame! to steal upon a lady's privacy, and watch unseen, her secret actions." She then pointed to the stairs; and entering the room, shut the door before Caroline could discover that he stood at its threshold.

He reached his own chamber. But the image of Caroline weeping—of Caroline unhappy, haunted him. He sat down, and nibbled the nail of his little finger to the quick, while pondering upon what he had just witnessed, and upon the unprofitable conversation he had just had with his mother. He attacked the nail of the other little finger, and was about half through it, when he thought he would read. He took up a book; it was Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding. Look at him! You would swear he is profoundly meditating upon the most abstruse argument to be found in the writings of that most abstruse of metaphysicians. No such

thing. He is meditating upon nothing but Caroline weeping ; and so far from seeing a single word of the page that lies open before him, he sees only her figure, as she sat in tears at the window of that small room.

He closes the volume, flings it into a chair, and walks to the window. He perceives Sir Everton and Lady Frances (for Bertha had left them) still walking upon the lawn, engaged in earnest discourse. If every word they uttered had fallen audibly upon his ears, he could not have known with greater certainty the subject of their conference. It is of him they speak, and of Caroline ; and Sir Everton agrees that she must be allowed to go ; and it is decided, nothing ought to be done to prevent her ; and in that decision the sentence of his own utter misery is pronounced.

So strongly did this conviction work, that, as he paced his room, he resolved upon a thousand different counter-projects, which were no sooner resolved upon than abandoned. It

was evident, the thought of leaving them afflicted Miss Bagot: but why should she be exposed to that affliction? He began to reason the matter with himself; and soon settled what was to be done. He would have a conversation with Caroline, as well as with his father, and convince both, in a friendly way, she had much better remain. He would persuade, argue, entreat, implore, in short, do everything but talk of his own love, to induce her to remain. And he doubted not he should be able to prevail, without compromising either Sir Everton or Lady Frances, without the painful ordeal of mutual explanations, and certainly, or not at all, without exposing Caroline to any risk of the slightest personal humiliation.

Thus he disposed of one part of the question. But there remained another. What would *he* do? And why should *he* not break through the trammels of custom, prejudice, obsolete obstacles, and build himself the fair, goodly edifice of his own felicity? He became suddenly sensible of the absurdity of

that practice which requires us to employ the eyes and affections of other people, in an affair that derives its whole value from pleasing the eyes and affections that are to be hoodwinked. This was perfectly natural. We are never so near doing what we wish, as when we have examined all the reasons why we should not do it.

CHAPTER X.

———In these ears of mine,
These credulous ears, he poured the sweetest words
That art or love could frame.

The Maid's Tragedy.

JUST at this juncture, an event occurred which, for many days and weeks became the almost exclusive topic of interest not only at the Hall, but throughout the neighbourhood and county.

Ephraim Bosley was found murdered in his bed one night, under most mysterious and appalling circumstances. His servant girl, too, about nineteen, shared his fate. Sir Everton, being a county magistrate, took the first inquisition of this terrible catastrophe; and from the depositions made before him, the following circumstances transpired.

Mr. Bosley's house stood by itself at the corner of a lane. There was no other dwelling within fifty or sixty yards of it. A farrier, who occupied the nearest tenement, stated, that hearing an alarm of fire about one o'clock in the morning, he got up, and running into the road, saw Mr. Bosley's house in flames. Hastening to the spot, he learned from those who had already assembled that neither Mr. Bosley nor his servant girl had been seen. He then burst open the front door, and rushing in, made his way through thick clouds of smoke to Mr. Bosley's bed-room. There he found two bodies, lying across the foot of the bed.

He took up one of the bodies, which proved to be that of Mr. Bosley, and endeavoured to carry it out; but before he got half way to the door, he was so suffocated with the smoke that he was forced to let it drop. George Rugby, however, of the Red Lion, who was standing near, got hold of it, and succeeded in carrying it into the lane. It was impossible to attempt fetching the other

body, for the house was then all in flames, and soon after the roof fell in.

It was thought at first the fire was accidental, and that Mr. Bosley had perished from suffocation. But, upon an examination of his body, it was clear that murder had been committed, and that the murderers, whoever they were, after rifling the house, had devoted it to the flames, in the hope of destroying all evidence of their crime. The many wounds and bruises, however, on the body of Mr. Bosley, particularly a deep gash on one side of his throat, left no doubt concerning the deed that had been perpetrated. The body of the girl, which was afterwards dug out of the ruins, was so much disfigured by the fire, that scarcely anything remained of her but her blackened bones, so that Mr. Wood, who was examined before the coroner, could give no opinion as to the cause of her death, beyond the presumption of her having perished in the flames.

These were the whole of the facts that came out. Of the murderer or murderers no clue

whatever could be obtained. So cleanly had they done their work, by firing the house, that the only vestige of it ever discovered, was a knife of singular workmanship, which was picked up in the lane by a little girl, several days afterwards. It was painfully evident that this instrument had been employed in the bloody deed, for the blade, which was much notched, besides being stained with blood, had several small pieces of flesh still adhering to it. It was a pocket-knife; the handle made out of a deer's horn, with a greyhound's head carved at the top. In this state it was carefully preserved by Sir Everton, as an evidence that might one day, perhaps, be the means of bringing the criminals to justice.

The scorched and mangled corpse of the ill-fated Mr. Bosley, together with the half-consumed bones of his equally ill-fated servant, were deposited in one coffin, and consigned to one grave, amid the deep sympathy and awe-stricken feelings of their rustic neighbours. Nor did the worthy rector, the Rev.

Jonas Dankes, omit the opportunity of making this terrible catastrophe a subject for moral exhortation on the following Sunday. His text was, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." But though he began in a style every way suitable to the comprehension of the majority of his congregation, he soon wandered into topics fit only for an auditory of schoolmen.

He inquired, first, what the mark was which the Lord had set upon Cain, "lest any one finding him should kill him;" confuted the opinion of Moses Gerundensis that it was a "letter;" and the conclusion of Don Isaac Abarbinell that "it was nothing else but a continual trembling and consternation of his whole body, especially his head, which would manifestly point out and distinguish him to any one that should cross his path." Neither would he allow that the mark "was a stony heart, which made him formidable to all;" nor a "mark imprinted on his forehead," according to Rabbin Solomon; nor the "circle of a sun rising up upon him," according to Rabbin

Judah ; nor "a horn branching out upon him," according to Rabbin Joseph. Finally, he was most inclined to agree with the author of the Arabic Catena, who maintained that this mark was such an impression (as if made with a pen of iron, or the point of a diamond) as "enabled Cain to walk and be secure among the wildest of the beasts ; a sword could not enter him ; fire could not burn him ; water could not drown him ; the air could not blast him ; nor any thunder or lightning strike him !"

It is doubtful, however, whether the rector would have composed so erudite a discourse, or introduced into it, as he did, "the short litany conceived by Noah, and daily prayed in the ark before the body of Adam" (to show that the Sethians used to pray in the name of the blood of Abel), if he had not been informed that Sir Everton himself would certainly be present, accompanied by Archdeacon Bradwardine, the great Hebraist, who was then upon a visit at the Hall. But the Archdeacon was actually seen asleep in the middle of it ; and when it

was over he whispered to the Baronet, "Your friend has preached a sermon about a murder committed in his own parish, which, besides containing everything that needed to be said, contained a great deal more—everything which had nothing to do with it." Sir Everton, in repeating this opinion to the rector, kindly omitted the last part.

It was while the little world of Ashbourne and its vicinity were living upon these murders, as our larger world is wont to do upon murders of another kind, when merry bells from every steeple ring out the glad tidings of some famous victory, that Cameron found an opportunity for having that friendly conversation with Miss Bagot which he considered so likely to convince her of the unnecessary propriety of going to live with her uncle.

Caroline had expressed some curiosity to see the ruins of Mr. Bosley's house, and Cameron, of course, offered to accompany her. She wished Arabella, or Bertha, or both, to be of the party; but Bertha happened to have a bad ear-ache, and Arabella thought the day too

hot : so they were under the necessity of going alone.

In their walk *to* Ashbourne, they talked of little else except the shocking event which had so recently occurred ; but in returning *from* it, Cameron, who proposed going through the park by the north gate, because it was more shady, though it was fully a mile farther, found something else to talk about. After trying to lead the conversation to his object, in such a way that it might seem to be quite accidental, but which Caroline carefully prevented by admiring the landscape, noticing the innocent gambols of a flock of sheep, and begging him to listen to the rich melody of the birds who were carolling on every side, he at last introduced it without farther periphrasis.

“ You intend leaving us, Miss Bagot ? ”

Caroline was silent.

“ You will pardon the liberty I take in mentioning it.”

Still silent.

"Arabella has confided to me all the circumstances which have induced you to resolve upon this step."

Not a word.

He paused to consider how he should get on without assistance ; and resolved to say something which she must answer, one way or the other, unless she had really determined not to speak upon the subject.

"Does your intention remain unchanged?"

"Certainly, sir," was the response, in a low, embarrassed voice.

There was now a very long pause, during which Caroline wished they were at the Hall, and regretted they had taken the longest road ; while Cameron was afraid they would get there before he had said half what he intended.

"I will not affect to question the propriety of your motives," he at length observed. "Believing what you do, and feeling what you must, you would be less than what you are, could you hesitate."

"It is most painful to me," she replied in

the same low, embarrassed tone, "to listen to these observations. Pray, forbear them."

"I would do so," he rejoined, "if I could; and I should do so, were I not the most selfish of created beings. Yet you may believe me when I add, that *your* happiness is my first consideration."

"I am grateful for your kindness, sir; but pray, pray, make that gratitude still greater by sparing me now; and be assured I shall not think you less mindful of my happiness, because you leave undisturbed a resolution of which you yourself approve."

"Nay," replied Cameron; "I cannot suffer you to construe my acquiescence in the propriety of your motives into an admission of the necessity of acting upon them. There is, I know, a seeming contradiction in my words; for they express but fragments of my thoughts. Yet all my thoughts, and all my wishes, too, centre but in *one* end, which I would describe by *one* word, — *STAY!*"

His voice dropped; its tone was deep and thrilling, as he murmured rather than spoke

this word, "stay," in the ear of Caroline. She felt its power, as if it had been breathed into her very soul. A strange perturbation came over her, which, though she concealed, she could not sufficiently command to attempt a reply. Cameron, too, was conscious he had betrayed, in that one word, the source of all his anxiety, — of all the hopes blended with it. He endeavoured, therefore, to qualify its effects.

"I know not," he resumed, "why I should shrink from the avowal of feelings which I but share in common with every one who has the happiness of your acquaintance. Sir Everton, Lady Frances, my sisters, — my friend Aston, — indeed the whole circle of our friends, if they mention you at all, do so with such encomiums as I would not offend you by repeating. And why do I allude to this? That you may understand (unless you suppose I alone am protected from your influence) why I must lament a resolution which threatens us with your loss."

He was satisfied he had discovered a mighty

logical reason to account for his wish to retain Caroline at the Hall, in thus setting forth that she was a most interesting and agreeable young lady, whom everybody liked as well as himself, and everybody complimented in a way he could not think of repeating, lest it should offend her modesty. Caroline, meanwhile, had rallied her agitated spirits so as to be able to reply to this extremely ingenious speech with tolerable composure.

“If I feel honoured,” said she, with much calm dignity of manner, “by the desire you express that I should continue here, you must forgive me when I add that I am better pleased with the sanction you have bestowed upon the reasons which determine me not to do so, — a determination I could not relinquish without forfeiting my own self-respect.”

This was logic for logic, — the lady proving herself the more honest logician of the two. Cameron, therefore, abjured sophistry, and borrowed a dangerous weapon from the armoury of nature.

“I cannot recal my words,” said he, “nor,

as far as you are concerned, am I desirous of doing so. *Your happiness, Miss Bagot, is my first consideration.* Tell me, then, that you will be *happier* when away — let me hear this confession from your own lips — say but yes — and I will harass you no more with solicitations.”

“You are unjust in the task you assign me,” replied Caroline, with more firmness than she had yet assumed. “Nor unjust alone, but ungenerous ——.”

“Use not that word!” exclaimed Cameron.

“Yet it but expresses your fault,” answered Caroline, in accents of plaintive reproach: then, in accents far more plaintive, continued, “When I lost my dear father, I owed much — what I can never repay — to the tender regard shown for my lonely situation by your sister, Lady Frances, and Sir Everton. I hardly know how I should have supported my affliction, but for them. Is it then from such friends, such benefactors, you ask me to confess that I shall part with pleasure, — and to acknowledge that I shall be happier when separated

from them? You may believe me, sir, when I add, that in going I sacrifice my *own* wishes to the wishes of *others* — wishes so painfully expressed, that I have wept bitter tears to think they exist."

"Can I hear you talk thus," exclaimed Cameron, "and not forswear all I have said, except that 'one word,' which comprises all I *would* say?"

"You humble me sadly, sir," interrupted Caroline in a tremulous voice. "I am most grateful for the many kindnesses I have received; and I trust that whatever imaginary offence may have caused the displeasure which warns me to depart, it will not survive my going."

"Stay!—stay!" exclaimed Cameron with much perturbation.

"It cannot be."

"It can, and would be—"

He checked himself. There was a pause; and then he continued in a lower voice,—

"Stay, I beseech you! My tongue dare not pronounce the motive of my prayer; but stay!"

Again he paused. Caroline seemed to have lost all power over her own thoughts. There was such an earnest tone of supplication—such an intensity of feeling concentrated in the deep modulation of Cameron's voice, — such an apparent mystery, even, in his anxiety, that she grew bewildered with her emotions. Cameron resumed the conversation.

“ I could be content,” said he, “ with your promise, if I might presume to ask one. Say only you will not go for a month — a week — or, rather, fix no time ; but say you will *not* go till we have again discoursed of its necessity — till I acknowledge it would be better to meet no more. There is no equivocation hidden beneath these words ; for even *I* should then implore you to depart with as much fervour as now I entreat you not.”

“ Why need I make this promise ? ” answered Caroline, falteringly. “ It is nearly certain I shall not be *able* to remove from the Hall within the longest period you have mentioned.”

“ Ah ! then you allow me to name the sub-

ject to you again," interrupted Cameron vehemently. "I am satisfied! Oh! do not revoke the permission," he continued, perceiving Caroline about to speak; "let me indulge in the thought, in the dream merely, should it prove no more, that my destiny is in my own hands, and that perhaps I can shape it to my hopes. Good God! what a vision of possible felicity beams upon my fancy at this instant!"

Caroline tried to persuade herself this vision was only the anticipation of her remaining. She was confounded by what followed.

"Miss Bagot!" continued Cameron, "I should dishonour myself and you if I did not now cast off a disguise which has hitherto concealed the conquest you have made. I might have slumbered on in imagined security, to wake at last and know the truth; but when I learned that I was to lose you, I learned at the same moment I could not bear the loss; and the struggle was at an end. Forgive all the imprudence, all the agitation of this declaration; or, if you will, punish me with your dis-

pleasure, your disdain, your coldness, anything but your absence."

"Indeed, indeed," replied Caroline, with a palpitating heart, "I cannot, I must not, I *ought* not to permit this. You distress me exceedingly. I feel I have already allowed too much, more than enough to deprive me of that self-approbation which has hitherto been my shield against the unkindness of which I complain. Could Lady Azledine and Sir Everton know of this, might they not justify all that is past, by their timely fears of that which has now happened? Do not, then, provide me with a motive to execute, instantly, a purpose which in truth should now be no longer delayed."

"Then," replied Cameron, "you bid me not hope that I can ever awake in *your* bosom feelings kindred to those which possess my own. Say even thus much, however, frankly and sincerely, and I will not meanly persecute you with an undesired love."

"Pray say no more!" responded Caroline;
"and let what has been said be forgotten."

"Never!" answered Cameron vehemently,

“till I know my doom. I can well understand all you would urge upon one particular point; but I give that to the winds. Let me know I am rejected, utterly and without hope rejected, and I will heal my broken peace as best I can. But tell me it is not so (and I ask not the confession in words; a look, a trembling aspiration breathed from your lips, nay, your very silence shall suffice), and I can be content.”

Caroline wept—in silence! Cameron pressed her hand to his lips as he exclaimed —

“I am answered! Those tears give language to that silence, whose mute eloquence gives hope to my soul! Oh, my beloved! for such you are to me, and you have vouchsafed that I may call you so,—do not doubt that I shall find a way to dispel every ominous cloud that seems to darken the beginning of our path!”

Caroline's step tottered, and she would have fainted in Cameron's arms had he not led her trembling to a seat. She remained several minutes wholly subdued by her feelings. When

she had sufficiently recovered, she arose, and they continued their walk in mutual silence. At length she spoke.

"I greatly fear this hour will prove the source of many troubles! I wish I could discourse calmly with you, upon the strange things that have happened in it. Then, perhaps, I might lead you back from the dangerous precipice to which you are hastening; for I see nothing but peril in the future."

"And if there be," said Cameron tenderly, "it shall not approach *you*."

Caroline sighed, as though she already owned it could not, if it came at all, smite a single victim.

"I would not, in anything," he continued, "too easily flatter myself with success in the beginning, but reckon rather the difficulties of the conclusion; and be assured, I have not set foot in this business till my hand could take hold of the end. I know the worst, the very worst that can be; and for that very worst am I prepared."

"As *I* should be," she replied, dejectedly,

“to forbid it. I feel myself a guilty one even now; to let a mischief glide into the path of those who suspect it not, when I have the power to turn it aside.”

“You wrongfully accuse yourself; you have *not* the power; for from this moment my course is taken.”

“Heaven knows how I shall be able to meet Lady Frances and Sir Everton, henceforward!” she exclaimed. Then turning to him, with a meek, upbraiding look, she added:—
“Why have you done this?”

“What means the question?”

“Alas! I am not what I was an hour ago! Some spell is on me. I seem to move under its influence; to go on, and on, whither its mysterious power impels. I see my danger, yet cannot shun it. Ask me not then what *I* mean; but tell me what *this* means?”

“I have been to blame,” said he. “I lost myself in the fear of losing you. In the strength of *your* purpose lay *my* weakness and the little power I had to hold my feelings in subjection. Their violence has troubled you; forgive it!”

"I must needs forgive that need to be forgiven," replied Caroline.

"Do not talk thus, unless you would see me desperate! I can bear anything better than the thought of having *added* to your unhappiness."

"Words that have gone forth," she answered, "cannot be as if they had never been spoken. And such words!"

"But they can be *only* words," replied Cameron; "and shall be so, if you wish it."

"Have they not already bound the future?" demanded she, with a deep sigh. "I fear so! Though *they* might be recalled, renounced, the hour that has passed is irrevocable!"

"*I* would not bring it back," exclaimed Cameron, "for the gift of all that went before it, except it were to purchase some desire of thine. Oh! banish these fears! I feel a quick and mounting spirit, which forebodes all good. But *you* must smile. And you must seal my pardon for what I have done, by granting that for which I did it. Say, you will *not go*."

Caroline turned her eyes upon him. They were wet with tears; and through their glistening moisture there beamed a consenting look, so fraught with meanings which have no other language, that Cameron, whose heart thrilled beneath their fascination, whose mind was bewildered with joy at their silent confession, scarcely heard her as she murmured, "Have I not more than said so?"

They were both lost in the delirium of their feelings, and moved along unconscious of the eyes that were now upon them; for, turning out of a shrubbery, which opened upon the lawn, they were met by Arabella and Bertha, who had seen them at a distance, and were advancing to join them.

Cameron hastily put his looks in order; and rousing his entranced thoughts, inquired of Arabella, how her ear-ache was? And of Bertha, whether she found the heat less oppressive? The former replied, she had not got the ear-ache; the latter, that she was fond of heat. Cameron stammered and stuttered something about intending the blunder, just to puzzle

them ; while Caroline, taking hold of Arabella's arm, began to talk as fast as she could, of the melancholy appearance presented by the ruins of poor Mr. Bosley's house. Arabella was quite amazed at the volubility of her friend ; but not quite at a loss to account for it. It was a considerable time before she was allowed to "get a word in edgeways" (as Mrs. Kilpin was accustomed to say, when forced to listen to Mr. Flinn for half a minute) ; but at last there was an opportunity ; and then, with a sly glance at her brother, and in a tone that made his ears tingle as she spoke, she said :—

"What *can* have been your reason, Cameron, for bringing Miss Bagot through the park, when you know it is above a mile out of the way, and that she is not used to such long walks ? She looks as if she were fatigued to death ; and enough to make her, in such a broiling sun."

"Why, the truth is," replied Cameron, "I thought it better to return through the park because it was shady."

"Oh ! that was it !" answered Arabella, as

if perfectly convinced. "Ah — I see — it is more shady and — retired."

"Yes," rejoined her brother, "it is very shady; all under the old oaks; shady and cool;" — not choosing to adopt the other word which his sister had so significantly added.

"But, now I think of it," exclaimed Arabella, "I don't see how you *could* have come 'all under the old oaks,' for that path leads to the chestnut avenue."

Caroline gently pinched Arabella's arm to make her hold her tongue; but Cameron, with wonderful presence of mind, put on an air of innocent surprise, and bursting into an obstinate kind of laugh, exclaimed—

"Well, that is excellent! Didn't *you* think they were the old oaks, Miss Bagot?"

"Pooh! nonsense!" interrupted Arabella. "I dare say Caroline was thinking of something else—than oaks!" And she returned the pinch which Caroline had just bestowed.

"I don't care whether they were oaks, or elms, or walnuts," replied Cameron, with assumed indifference. "I know they were shady and cool."

“ And *very* retired,” added Arabella.

They had now reached the Hall; and Cameron, turning from the door, directed his steps really towards the old oaks, that he might give himself up to meditation; while Arabella and Bertha accompanied Caroline to her apartment, who would gladly have enjoyed the same luxury.

CHAPTER XI.

I cannot clothe my thoughts and just defence,
In such an abject phrase; but 'twill appear
Equal, if not above, my low condition.

MASSINGER.

It required a much less penetrating mind than that of Lady Azledine to discover the event which had taken place. Cameron, from being moody, abstracted, and fretful, became all at once master of his wonted gaiety and ease. Having triumphed over one difficulty, the animating hope of conquering what remained, scarcely allowed a desponding thought to disturb the bright sunshine of his mind. He seemed indeed to have forgotten, in the blandishments of present felicity, that he had a task to perform, upon the success of which

depended not only its duration, but its very existence almost.

Caroline, too, was changed ; but it was a change that deepened every tint of character which partook of timidity, of pensive musings, or of intense feeling.

She hardly knew herself. Was it possible she was indeed the same being? That she had the same eyes, or ears, or appetites, or affections? Objects of sight, of sound, of desire, had acquired properties unknown before. Even inanimate things, the ground she trod upon, the trees that whispered over her, the very walls that were her dwelling-place, spoke to her heart with voices of mysterious delight ; for they were hallowed by recollections, or clothed with hopes, in all of which mingled the image of Cameron.

Was *he* too — *could* he be — that agreeable companion only, that gay, light-hearted brother of her Arabella, that proud heir of the house of Azledine, and no more — which was all he had been, till in her predestined hour she knew him as the mighty one whose spell

was now upon her? Where had lain those tumultuous feelings which he, by one word, had called into existence? Where had they slumbered till roused into giant life at his voice? They were and they were not, with such an invisible space between, that she could not trace the shadowy line of separation. She remembered only there *was a time* when indifference, like a quiet stream, flowed as its boundary; and there *was a moment*, when passion, like an impetuous cataract, rolled its waters over it, and bore her headlong in its course.

And when she reflected how suddenly this change had been wrought, strange fears disturbed her, lest *as* suddenly it might pass away, and some other hold her in the same enchantment. Why not? It *had* happened once; it *might* happen again. Cameron was but the first; a second, a third *might* come; and *one* would come at last, perhaps, to blight domestic peace, and profane recorded vows at God's own altar! How horrible the imagination! How humiliating the fear! Then, she would fling from her these fore-

bodings, ashamed of such an aptitude to doubt her own steadfast purity. It was impossible but that the feelings she then had, must have been produced once and for ever. They could know no decay. They could exist but for him who had created them. They were a part of her very self; a second life, to which she had been born; which could perish only with her own being, and grow cold in one and the same grave.

As often as she reasoned with herself this way, a serene satisfaction diffused itself over her mind, dimmed by no other anxiety than the knowledge that her love *must* be vexed with crosses. She had heard Lady Azledine, while Cameron was yet at the university, dwell with high anticipations upon the accession of wealth and family aggrandisement, which she one day hoped to see realised by bringing about a suitable alliance for him; and she knew that Sir Everton indulged in the same anticipations.

They were natural; they were customary. The riches that are much, would be more.

The influence that is great, would be greater. The rank that already elbows a coronet, would fain wear one. But love's traffic is with hearts, not gold; *its* ambition, peaceful happiness, not a vain pageant; and *its* proudest title, fidelity; which it would not barter for a dukedom. Caroline had *only* her love, with which to enrich the heir of Azledine Hall; and *only* her virtues with which to ennoble his name. She felt how poor an offering the first was, in their eyes who had a right to exact a costlier one; and, if ever she allowed herself to think of the second, with the humility congenial to a nature so endowed, it was to deplore that accident of birth which removed to a distance (small indeed, but enough, she feared, for misery) him in whose sight they would have been an all-sufficient dowry.

Deep and resistless, however, as was her love, it did not extinguish the becoming pride which taught her to remember her own lineage, and the irreproachable, if not ancient, blood, that flowed in her veins. She never forgot she was the daughter of a gallant and

honourable father, who had gone to his grave with the scars of many wounds received in fighting the battles of his country. Were he alive, she knew he would as soon have borne an insult that tarnished the brightness of his sword, as suffer her to marry into a family with the stigma of a cold assent wrung from condescension. It had been more suited to *his* notions, to match her beneath her condition, and so confer, rather than receive, whatever obligations there was to be.

Caroline inherited somewhat of this spirit, modified by feelings natural to her sex, and still more by those which sprung from a sensitive and impassioned temperament. Her heart *would* be heard in the argument, as well as her pride and her reason. Her wishes *would* strive to conciliate the one and silence the other.

Thus tossed to and fro—now passion-driven—now sinking under apprehensions—and now wounded by self-reproaches, it was not surprising her deportment betrayed the agitation of her spirits. She grew dejected, silent,

thoughtful; restless when Cameron was absent — confused when he was present — disturbed at the mention of his name — still more embarrassed when the conversation related to him. She avoided being alone with Lady Azeldine; shunned, whenever she could, joining in the walks or rides of the family, and courted the solitude of her own chamber.

Arabella alone was admitted to her confidence, — perhaps because she had given many intelligible hints that Caroline could, in fact, reveal nothing. This confidence was reposed, however, with an earnestness so sad and solemn — with such pathetic adjurations to bury it in her heart's core, that she received it more like some melancholy confession of a death-bed, than the joyous disclosure of a love-secret by one youthful bosom to another. But her affectionate nature prevailed over her disposition to innocent raillery, and she plighted her faith.

Meanwhile, it had become so grossly apparent, that an attachment was rapidly forming (if it were not already irrevocably formed) between Cameron and Miss Bagot, that Lady

Frances determined to wait no longer for the voluntary departure of the latter ; whose continued silence upon the subject she now began to consider as a want of candour amounting almost to positive duplicity. Not that she was prepared to intimate any wish of her own respecting her continued residence in the family. She only intended to have such a conversation with her as would make it impossible she could continue.

The intention was no sooner formed than executed. One morning, Caroline received, through Bertha, a request from her ladyship that she would attend her in her private room. She instantly obeyed the summons ; and as she had a foreboding of its object, she was prepared to conduct herself with becoming firmness. When she entered the apartment, however, her reception was such as made her task more difficult than she expected ; for, instead of coldness, reserve, and haughtiness, Lady Azledine's manner was affectionate, gentle, and kind.

“ I have sent for you, my dear Miss Bagot,”

said she, as Caroline seated herself by her side, "to mention a circumstance which has caused both myself and Sir Everton much uneasiness, and which no earthly consideration, except the duty we have to perform, (in this case a most painful one, I assure you,) could have induced me to notice."

She paused. Caroline slightly inclined her head, to signify she was prepared to receive this distressing communication. Lady Azledine took her hand, and continued,—

"You know, my dear young friend, that we are all of us, in this world, compelled to respect certain prejudices, however much their observance may sometimes wound our best feelings; prejudices which we cannot, without the risk of more serious inconveniences, disregard. I speak thus to you, because I am aware you have a mind capable of duly appreciating the importance of that to which I allude."

Caroline again bowed her head in silent acknowledgment of the compliment; and Lady Azledine proceeded—

"You will not suspect me of idle flattery, when I say that the opportunities I have had of observing your conduct, have impressed me with the highest opinion of you; and I willingly give this proof of the sincerity of my words, that not only since you have resided here, but, before, I have uniformly pointed you out to my own daughters, as a model for imitation in everything which constitutes the true excellence of the female character."

The tears rushed into Caroline's eyes at this unexpected tribute; but she could only press the hand which held hers, in silent gratitude.

"You may believe me, therefore," continued her ladyship, "when I go yet further, and confess that I should have rejoiced (if circumstances would have admitted of it) to see you united with my family, in ties of closer interest than those which now subsist."

"Madam!" exclaimed Caroline, with a faltering voice.

"Come, come," replied Lady Azledine, mildly, "be as open and as candid with me, as

I mean to be with you. You may be sure I have not sought an interview like this upon slight grounds ; or, that having sought it, it can answer the purpose of either to disguise our sentiments. It will be tenderness to a situation I know how to respect, and to feelings which I cannot condemn, if I spare you the confession of both, by declaring that *I* know, without your saying so, what has been the consequence of your daily intercourse, during the last eight or nine months, with my son Cameron."

Caroline felt the blood glow in her burning cheeks, while her breathing quickened almost to suffocation.

"I know, too," continued her ladyship, "and by the same means that I have become possessed of *your* secret, what has been the effect upon Cameron himself. He thinks he loves you ; as *you* think you love *him*."

Caroline burst into tears, and sobbed violently. Lady Azledine paused for a few moments, and then resumed—

"Do not imagine I mean to chide what is

so natural a result of the circumstances in which you have both been placed. But now, my dear Miss Bagot, let me speak to you as I would to my own daughter, were she so situated. Cameron is an only son, the heir to a large estate, the representative of an ancient family. He cannot, without violating the duties imposed upon him by each of those conditions, fix his affections with a total disregard of them all,—and he cannot disregard them all, without doing that which I feel assured he *never will do*, deeply offend both Sir Everton and myself. Need I say another word?"

"Certainly not," said Caroline, who had now recovered all the composure which the occasion required. "It is enough for me to know that both by your Ladyship and Sir Everton, an event is dreaded, which *I* have the power to avert. Spare me the pain of a prolonged discourse upon the subject; but receive my solemn assurance, that as I have the power, so I have equally the will and the resolution to do what becomes me."

Caroline rose, and was about to retire.

"Stay, my dear Miss Bagot," exclaimed her ladyship; "I am sure from your manner, you have misinterpreted either my motives or my words."

"Neither," replied Caroline, calmly. "But permit me to withdraw; indeed, I *cannot* endure a further conversation."

She left the room. Lady Azledine congratulated herself upon the issue of the interview. The blow was struck. The one great object was secured. But it would be injustice to conceal, that her triumph was dashed with sorrow. She had spoken no more than the simple truth when she declared, that if circumstances would have permitted it, she should have rejoiced to see Caroline united with her family. In fact, she not only admired her character, but loved her amiable, affectionate, gentle disposition; and though the self-created slave of *circumstances*, she really felt, and acutely, too, the sufferings which their tyranny compelled her (as she taught herself to believe) to inflict. Nor,

with all her admiration of the noble-minded girl, was she quite prepared for the elevated display she had just witnessed, — a display, however, which she knew how to estimate at its just value. Upon the whole, therefore, there were many deductions from the sum of her triumph.

Neither that day, nor the next, nor the next, did Caroline quit her chamber. She pleaded indisposition ; and she was indeed ill ; sick with grief ; fevered with the anguish of blighted hope. Yet, she complained not ; she blamed no one ; an accusing murmur, even, never passed her lips, or dwelt within her heart. It was all as it should be ; only, now she must walk in sorrow to her grave, with the solitary consolation, that, perhaps, her passage thither might be short ; which she prayed it might be. From her window, she could see the church-yard where her father lay. She fancied she could almost distinguish his tombstone ; and she would sit for hours, gazing with streaming eyes upon the imaginary spot, while sigh after sigh was breathed in silent

supplications to Heaven that she might soon be at peace herself.

Arabella was her constant companion, sharing those melancholy hours she could not clothe in brighter colours. Lady Azledine, too, anxiously endeavoured to soothe her by doing everything a warm heart and generous sympathy could inspire, except the only thing which would have been worth all the rest. But she easily persuaded herself *that was what she could not do.*

CHAPTER XII.

Heaven first taught letters for some wretch's aid,
Some banish'd lover or some captive maid ;
They live, they breathe, they speak what love inspires,
Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires.

POPE.

DENIED the consolation of seeing Caroline, Cameron eagerly watched for an opportunity of speaking with Arabella, from whom he received the painful information that Lady Frances had taxed her with their mutual love, and enjoined her to renounce him.

“Renounce me ! renounce me !” he exclaimed. “And did she promise my mother—”

“She promised nothing,” interrupted Arabella ; “but from what she has done, I fear her intentions are the same as if she had.”

“What has she done ?”

"Written a long letter to her uncle."

"Well?"

"And she told me it was to beg he would come here as soon as possible. The letter was so blotted with tears, that I am sure the General will never be able to make it all out."

"Does she not mention me?" demanded Cameron, dejectedly.

"Ah, my dear brother!" exclaimed Arabella, in a tone of unaffected tenderness; "she loves you too well for her own happiness, if she do not have you."

"Has she said so?"

"Could you but see her, you would not need that she should say so."

"And can I not see her?"

"There would be cruelty in it just now, I think; but—"

"I understand you, dear, kind sister; yes, a letter—a note—six words only, would be a comfort to her. Come with me to my room, I'll write one, you can give it, and bring me an answer."

"Which will be a comfort to *you*," replied Arabella, smiling through tears.

"It will, indeed ! So, come."

"I will come in a quarter of an hour ; by that time you will have it ready."

"A quarter of an hour !—a quarter of a minute !" said Cameron, and hurried away.

It so happened that when Arabella left her brother, she met Lady Frances, from whom she could not get disengaged for nearly an hour. She then hastened to Cameron, who was still writing, having just begun the fourth sheet of paper. A lover's thoughts clothe themselves in words faster than his pen can trace them.

"In one minute," said he, as his sister entered, "one minute, and I shall have finished."

"If your one minute is to consist of four of your quarters," she replied, "had I not better come again in the evening ?"

"Hush ! I have only six words more."

Arabella took a book, and seated herself at the window. Cameron went on, and finished the fourth sheet of paper.

“And now, my dear sister,” said he, as he laid down his pen, to collect and fold the four sheets, “give this to her, and tell her I have not said the hundredth part of what I have to say.—But, stop. I may as well tell her so myself, in a postscript,” and he began the fifth sheet, with—P. S.

To leave any portion of that fifth sheet blank was wholly out of the question. The postscript consequently was exactly one-fifth of the epistle itself.

“You are a dear, kind creature,” he exclaimed, as he at last gave her the letter, “for thinking of this ; and I shall wait impatiently till you return with the answer.”

“I would not be too impatient, if I were you,” observed Arabella, weighing the letter in her hand. “Besides, I am not sure Caroline will send any answer. However, I promise to return as speedily as I can, in either case.”

She was no sooner gone than Cameron remembered he had forgotten so many important things, that he sat down to begin a second

letter, when, to his utter amazement, he was interrupted by the entrance of Aston.

The surprise and joy of this unexpected meeting, banished, for a moment, all sense of his anxiety. He sprung from his chair, seized his friend's hand, and wrung it with a gripe so cordial, that when he recovered possession of it, he began to straighten the fingers.

In answer to inquiries as to what had brought him so suddenly back, without any hint or notice of his coming, he replied that he thought he might venture to dispense with the formality and thus make sure of the extra welcome, which generally waits upon pleasures that take us unawares. He had paid his respects to Sir Everton and Lady Frances; and learning that Cameron was in his own room, he resolved to bestow upon him the same favour.

While they were in conversation, the door opened, and Arabella entered. A faint exclamation of surprise burst from her, the colour of her cheek deepened into crimson, the next moment turned to ashy paleness, and had not

Aston supported her to a chair near the window, she would certainly have fainted. As she tottered to it, she extended her hand to Cameron, who seized with avidity the paper it contained.

It was a note from Caroline. He tore it open, and read these few emphatic sentences, traced with a trembling pen :

“We must find consolation in the hope that we are not destined to be for ever miserable. The paradise of hope — the future — is the only balm for present griefs. We may never be *happier* than we now are; but *can* we be *more wretched*? I answer for myself—no!

“I write the sentence, and in the same moment, revoke it. Yes, Cameron, *I* may be rendered infinitely more wretched—but only by yourself. If you embitter *my* suffering by letting me see that you cannot bear your own; if you attempt to change a purpose which you ought to sustain me in fulfilling; then, indeed, I shall feel that my present misery is not my greatest.

“I AM THINE! When I cease to be so, hold

before my eyes this surrender of my heart, and make me confess that it proclaims me unworthy of being yours."

Cameron was too deeply moved by what he had read, to heed anything which passed between Aston and Arabella. He was roused from his abstraction only by the latter whispering to him as she left the room, "I have advice for you."

When she was gone, he found from Aston's observations that he had become acquainted, through her, with the exact state of the affair between himself and Caroline; but before he could enter into explanations, he was confounded by the following declaration of his friend.

"If it be the pride of blood only, my dear Cameron, which stands between you and your hopes, I have most strangely obtained a knowledge of circumstances during my absence, which may go far, perhaps, towards removing that phantom."

"What is it you mean?"

"It is rather a long story," he replied, "and

a most singular one withal ; one, too, which will not a little surprise you when you hear who are, or rather were, the principal actors in it. But I must defer the narrative to a more leisure moment. All I would now say is, that Miss Bagot is descended from a stock sufficiently ancient and noble to satisfy the most bigoted veneration for heraldry and genealogy."

Cameron's countenance brightened at hearing anything which might throw additional lustre round his beloved, in the estimation of others ; in his own, she had already every gift whether of fortune or nature, which he would have demanded at the hands of either, had it rested with him alone to dispense the favours of both.

"Should it be as you say," he observed, after a pause, "it may do something,—but not all. The world has an alchemy of its own, by which it can now-a-days extract purer blood from gold than ancestry ; for you shall see the daughter of a soap boiler, with a hun-

dred thousand pounds, step before one whose pedigree stretches to the conquest, but whose rent-roll will not cover the palm of the bride. Match heraldry and money against money alone, and they will beat, at the odds of one to ten;— blood and ten thousand carrying it against the Minorities and a hundred thousand. But what is it you have heard? Pray tell me, for I need something more than my own hopes to sustain me.”

Aston was about to reply, when Sir Everton entered. He had had only a few minutes’ conversation with him, and was impatient for more. He inquired if he had seen Arabella yet? What was the latest news in London? What the Pretender was about? Whether it was true, the King intended to reside in his Hanoverian dominions, and govern Great Britain by a Viceroy? with many other things, personal, political, and literary, which Aston answered according to the degree of his knowledge in all. Finally, he proposed a walk round the park, that he might see

some improvements which had been made during his absence.

Cameron accompanied them reluctantly ; for besides that he wished to hear what Aston had to relate, he was incapable of feeling any interest in ordinary matters. The ramble, however, filled up the time till dinner. At every opening of the trees which afforded a view of Caroline's window, his eyes instinctively took their direction from his heart. He hoped to catch a glimpse of her ; but she did not appear, to greet his longing sight.

CHAPTER XIII.

——— Abhorred villain !

Unnatural, detested, brutish villain !

SHAKSPEARE.

“You remember our friend, Peter Skink, the landlord of the Black Bull ?” said Aston, as he and Cameron were sauntering, in the twilight hour, along the chestnut avenue.

“Perfectly well, and his wife too—”

“Whom you praised for a very good sort of woman, before you had the pleasure of seeing her,” interrupted Aston.

“Yes ; but what of Peter ?”

“Why, he turns out to be an arrant rascal.”

“So much for your sentimental physiognomy, when you first beheld his grim visage.”

K 2

"Rascal as he is, however, or rather has been, the fellow is not altogether without a conscience, as you shall hear."

"Let me hear, then," exclaimed Cameron, fretfully. "You are horribly tedious."

Aston knowing the feelings which produced this little burst of peevish impatience, forgave it.

"On my way down," he continued, "I put up at the Black Bull, but to dine only; for I had no fancy to renew my acquaintance with the little blue check-bed over the gateway. I found Peter quite an altered man; brisk, cheerful, and talkative, and, to my thinking, far gone towards making the strapping wench Jenny, Mrs. Skink the second. He remembered me; inquired after you; and was absolutely facetious upon the subject of your adventure with his wife."

"The devil thank him for his mirth," interrupted Cameron. "It was the only time I was ever really frightened in my life."

"In the course of conversation, (for our friend Peter was now as liberal of his com-

pany and his speech, as he had been shy of both before,) I chanced to mention our adventure with young Neville, soon after leaving the Black Bull. He asked me, and, as I thought, with a slightly agitated voice, whether I knew who the mad youth was? I merely answered, that we had some talk with him; but I soon found that Peter himself had picked up a part of his story; for it seems he passed through the village while we were at breakfast, attracting, of course, general notice. About an hour or two after we had resumed our journey, Humphrey and his fellow servant stopped at the Black Bull to bait their horses, and make inquiries, when Peter, like a discreet host, contrived to obtain from the younger domestic, the name of his master; the fact of the mad youth being General Neville's son; the further information of his recent return from India, and still more recent assumption of the name of Neville, instead of that of Bagot; with, I dare say, many other family matters, in return for the information he was enabled to give of the road young Neville

had taken. All this he told me, adding, at the conclusion, that he would give the best guinea he ever had, if he could know *what* General Bagot it was."

"That was strange," observed Cameron.

"I thought so, and asked him his reasons for wishing so particularly to know the personal history of General Neville; but he replied it would be of no use to tell them, unless he could first learn who he was. I then hinted that if it were really of any importance to himself, or of any interest to General Neville, I could perhaps satisfy his curiosity. He looked at me with surprise, and said, if you are acquainted with General Neville, you can tell me one thing which I forgot to ask—how old he is? I answered, that I should guess his age to be approaching seventy—certainly more than sixty. He seemed to make a silent calculation of dates, and then remarked, 'it could not be the same person.' I now began to feel a little curious myself; for there was an earnestness about the man, which convinced me his inquiries did not arise from mere

prying curiosity. I still kept him on the subject, therefore, thinking he might drop some hint or expression which would satisfy my own curiosity; but Peter was abundantly circumspect. At length he asked me whether General Neville had a brother living? I told him my acquaintance with the General did not enable me to answer his question; but I knew he had a brother, who died some eight or ten months since. 'Was he in the army?' — 'Yes, he was a Major.' — 'Was he married?' — 'No; he was a widower, when he died.' — 'Had he any family?' — 'I could not tell what family he might have had; but, at the time of his death, he had only one daughter.' — 'What was her age?' — 'I should conjecture about twenty.' — 'And her name?' — 'Caroline — Miss Caroline Bagot.'"

"How very extraordinary!" exclaimed Cameron.

"Extraordinary?" repeated Aston. "You would have said so, indeed, had you been present, and beheld the countenance, and heard the voice of Skink, as he put these questions

with eager rapidity, and a total oblivion, (for the moment,) of that respectful manner which he usually observed. He was like a counsel cross-examining a witness. At each answer of mine, his large, heavy, melancholy eye flashed with intelligence; and when I mentioned the age and name of Miss Bagot, he clenched his bony hands, and compressed his thin, leather-looking lips, as if to keep down some rising emotion that was struggling to escape."

"What followed?" inquired Cameron.

"Why, my dinner," said Aston; "which at that moment made its appearance, and Peter, forthwith busied himself in the joint duties of landlord and waiter. But I managed it so as to hold him in discourse while I ate; and, (not to recapitulate the very form and manner of the dialogue,) what passed between us, left no doubt upon the mind of either Peter or myself, that the late Major Bagot *was* the identical person with respect to whom he had manifested all the anxiety I have described."

"Did he know Caroline's father?"

"You shall hear. I told you it was a long story, and you must be patient."

"So I am. But why can't you tell it in a few words?"

"Because I know no art of squeezing a conversation of three hours, into as many minutes; especially when almost every sentence of that conversation disclosed a fresh wonder."

"Well, go on, then, my dear fellow," said Cameron; "for if it last till midnight, I'll not leave you now, till you get to the end."

"I pressed Peter to be confidential; but it was not till I gave him to understand I was on my way to a friend's house, where I should probably have the pleasure of meeting Miss Bagot, that he seemed inclined to communicate those circumstances which, he had already hinted, so nearly concerned her."

"Concerned Caroline!" exclaimed Cameron.

"Good God! What were they!"

"It will be midnight, and dawn too," said Aston, "before I finish, if you break in upon

my narrative thus. When Skink heard me say that I should probably see Miss Bagot in a day or two, he promised to 'turn the matter over in his mind between that and bedtime, and perhaps speak out.' Here was a new dilemma. I had no intention of sleeping at the Black Bull, and I suspect Peter guessed as much; so hung out this bait to catch me. He was rewarded for his pains; for I resigned myself to the blue check bed, while he withdrew to turn the matter over in his mind. I saw no more of him, till our quondam friends, the exciseman, the lawyer, and the parson, had come, smoked their pipes, and gone home again. *They* inquired after him; *I* inquired after him. The only answer Jenny gave was, that 'her master was busy up stairs.' Just as the clock struck eleven, however, and I was meditating by the light of a solitary candle, which sent forth its dim rays from a cabbage-top, I heard Peter giving directions to Jenny to 'fasten up the doors and go to bed,' adding, that he would 'show the gentleman in the parlour to his room, himself.' A few minutes after he

came to me ; and remarking that he thought it better to wait till everybody was gone, and we could be quite alone, he drew his chair to the table. And now," continued Aston, " I will drop myself, as it were, and endeavour to give you, in the very words of Peter Skink, as far as I am able, the extraordinary narrative to which I listened."

At this instant the voice of Bertha was heard, calling upon her brother and Mr. Aston. Aston looked behind, and the moon having risen, he saw Bertha and Arabella, arm-in-arm, walking down the avenue towards them.

" Let us take to our heels," exclaimed Cameron, " and get round into the shrubbery. These girls will not leave us again, if they once get to us, and by heavens ! I cannot go to bed without the end of your story."

This proposal was all very well for Cameron, who, if he took to his heels, would only run away from his sisters ; but Aston saw the graceful form of Arabella moving along, and hastening to meet her, in a few minutes returned with the ladies leaning on his arm.

"You are very imprudent," said Cameron, addressing Bertha.

"Why, what have I done?"

"Done! Don't you see what a dew there is upon the ground? You will have your ear-ache again if you stay here. You know how subject you are to it, and the air is exceedingly chill."

"Supper is ready," replied Bertha.

"Well, well, go in, and we will come directly."

"By no means," interrupted Aston. "They have been so kind as to seek us; the least we can do is to accompany them."

He turned upon his heel, and walked towards the Hall. Cameron followed with Bertha; tenderly scolding her all the way for being so careless of herself, when she knew how dreadfully she always suffered from the ear-ache if she exposed herself to the night-air.

Upon entering the supper-room they found the rector there. He had come to shake hands with Aston, who was a prodigious favourite with him. Cameron, the moment he saw him,

began to despair of separating for the night time enough to get hold of Aston again before he went to bed. He knew what a sinner the worthy rector was ; and the last hope of such a possibility died within him when, soon after they were seated at table, he heard him ask Aston, " whether in the course of his reading he had ever met with any good authorities for doubting the existence of the *Lilith*, or *She-Devil*, of the Hebrews."

CHAPTER XIV.

You have killed a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you.

Much Ado about Nothing.

It was by agreement, that Aston left the door of his bedroom unlocked ; and the next morning, before six, Cameron was shaking him by the shoulder. When he opened his eyes, he complained pathetically of his friend's inhuman curiosity, which had put to flight delicious dreams, such as visit the slumbers of happy lovers. Cameron could have reproved him for touching on *this* theme, but that he was too impatient to hear the conclusion of his adventure with mine host of the Black Bull. He dispensed, therefore, by anticipation, with the superfluous ceremony of his getting up

and dressing himself, and only begged he would lie where he was, and begin.

“ I believe,” said he, after he had stretched and yawned for a quarter of an hour, to the infinite annoyance of his friend, “ I believe I left off —”

“ You left off,” interrupted Cameron, “ where old Skink was going to speak ; you were to give me his very words, as nearly as you could remember them.”

“ Exactly,” replied Aston. Another yawn.

“ Confound your gaping ; one would think you had had no sleep all night.”

“ Well,” continued Aston, stretching his arms over his head, and forcing his toes almost out at the foot of the bed, “ our friend Peter having seated himself, spoke as follows :—

“ ‘ About thirty years ago, or it may be a little more, I was in good circumstances in London, and kept a good house, for the accommodation of persons not caring to encumber themselves with houses of their own. Things went on very well, and I went on very well, till I married the late Mrs. Skink, and then (God for-

give me for saying so, for I believe she was an excellent woman), from that day nothing went on well. Yet she was as thrifty, pains-taking, bustling a body as ever stepped; and knew how to make two guineas by a lodger where I should have made but one. Sometimes, indeed, I used to think that this was it; and that people ran away with a notion they could be accommodated cheaper elsewhere. Certain it is, we began to be very often empty; and I am afraid the late Mrs. Skink was double-sharp in consequence upon those we did get, which won't do for a continuance. But she, poor soul, did all for the best, and liked matters to be the same at the year's end, whatever difference there might be either in the number or quality of our lodgers."

"Do you wish me to keep the third commandment?" said Cameron. "Because, if you do, you will pass over old Skink's history of himself and his diabolical wife."

"Do you wish me to finish my story?" replied Aston. "Because, if you do, you will let me go on my own way."

Cameron wrapped his morning gown about him, and settled himself in his chair like a martyr. Aston made his pillow comfortable, and continued.

“ ‘ Well, sir, every year got worse, instead of better, and I got pretty well into debt. It was about the time when I was at my wit’s end how to keep my chin above water,—as near as I can guess, nineteen or twenty years ago,—that the matter took place which is so oddly connected with our conversation to-day. A Lieutenant Bagot,—then a fine, handsome, soldierly-looking gentleman as you would wish to see,—came with his wife, to lodge at our house. Ah, sir ! she was a beautiful creature !—younger than her husband by several years, and a perfect picture to look at. She was tall, elegant, and such a waist, I could have spanned it ! She was so gentle, too, so obliging, so good natured ! I shall always think the late Mrs. Skink was jealous of her. They were a happy couple, and might have been so for many many years, if—but I hope God has forgiven Mrs. Skink !

“ ‘I should mention, that soon after they came to our house, Mrs. Skink found out, by hook or by crook, (as she always did every thing,) that it was a run-for-it marriage, and that the young lady was a nobleman’s daughter,—I forget, now, his name, but I know he was a great Irish or Scotch lord. I wouldn’t swear he was not a Duke; or some other title of that sort. However, he was a nobleman; and Lieutenant Bagot, being only Lieutenant Bagot, was not thought good enough, though love sees no difference between master and man, or between mistress and maid; so, when she ran away with him, because they wanted her to marry somebody with a title, old enough to be her grandfather, they turned their backs upon her. All this Mrs. Skink got hold of, before they had been a week in our house; and, moreover, that they had not been married above two months.

“ ‘It was soon pretty evident the Lieutenant was thin in the pocket, for we never saw any of his money except the rent. Mrs. Skink had not the laying out of a single shilling; but she

used to reckon, poor soul, that after a little time they would be forced to get into our debt, and then she would be able to fetch up ; because, if they could not pay, the young lady's father could, and no doubt would, upon a proper representation of things. Well, sir, they had been three months with us, and still owed us nothing, when the lieutenant was ordered to join his regiment abroad. Before he went, he spoke to Mrs. Skink and myself, begging us to show every attention to his wife during his absence, and promising that we should be handsomely rewarded for our trouble. To Mrs. Skink, in particular, he recommended her ; for she was at that time just beginning to be in the family situation. We both declared we would do every thing in our power to make the lady comfortable ; and the idea of leaving her in such respectable hands seemed to make him quite comfortable himself.

“ ‘ The lieutenant had scarcely been away a month, when one morning a handsome carriage, with fine liveries, stopped at our door, and an old gentleman got out, who inquired

for Mrs. Bagot. My wife showed him to her apartment, and then came to tell me that she was certain it was her father ; for the moment Mrs. Bagot saw him she turned pale and could not speak a word. He stayed about half an hour ; but came again the next day, when he stayed longer ; and then, a week or more passed without his coming, after which his visits were very frequent, and he would sometimes remain several hours. During this time my wife's words came to pass ; Mrs. Bagot was in our debt ; yet there had been neither waste nor extravagance ; for every penny that was laid out from the day of the lieutenant's going had passed through Mrs. Skink's hands. I, too, had advanced so much, that I was running short myself ; so my wife took an opportunity of mentioning the circumstance to the old gentleman, hinting that his daughter's situation required many little comforts she had not the means of obtaining ; which he no sooner heard, than he not only paid our bill, but lodged a considerable sum in our hands for Mrs. Bagot's use, promising when that was gone, more

should be forthcoming. Poor soul ! how Mrs. Skink chuckled (at her sagacity, as she called it,) when she showed me the money, and told me of the old gentleman's promises.

“ ‘ I should have observed, by the way, that he was particularly desirous the circumstance should not be mentioned to his daughter ; and she knew so little about how far a guinea would go, that she never asked a question, even up to the time when all the fresh supply was spent, and nearly twenty pounds added to it, out of my own pocket. She lived very retired, (not a soul calling upon her but her father,) reading, working, and fretting, from morning till night ; and I dare say wondered how the money did go, when at last she came to know her real situation, which was not, however, till a strange discovery was made.

“ ‘ One day, when her father (as we had all along considered him,) was with her, Mrs. Skink heard her talking very loud, and presently her bell rung violently. Mrs. Skink answered it herself, thinking there was something wrong ; but meeting the old gentleman

on the stairs, she returned to open the door for him. She thought he seemed flustered; and when she entered Mrs. Bagot's room, she found her in hysterics. Hearing the noise, I went up myself; but it was a long time before we could get her out of them; and when we did, she fell to crying like a child. It hurt me to see her; and Mrs. Skink, poor soul, cried herself, as if she had been her own mother.'"

"How the devil could you listen patiently to the canting old hypocrite?" exclaimed Cameron. "God forgive me! but I think I should have kicked him till I was tired, and then choked him, as an act of summary justice, for his long unpunished villanies."

"I declare," replied Aston, smiling at Cameron's indignation, "I was amused, rather than disgusted. I like these little touches of nature, where a man hangs a few dirty rags about him, and thinks he hides his sores. There was much of knavish simplicity in Peter's manner; the simplicity of a knave so familiar with knavery, that the sense of it is

blunted. I am afraid, therefore, from what *you* feel, that though I am striving to give you the very man, I have not succeeded."

"Go on, you old rascal," said Cameron—
"I already begin to look upon you as if, by a sort of double metempsychosis, you were actually both Skink and his wife."

Aston laughed, and continued.

"When she was able to speak, the first thing she said was, to beg we would never admit into the house again, the gentleman who had just quitted it. Mrs. Skink was thunder-struck; I was puzzled. Mrs. Skink began to soothe her; remarking it was a thousand pities she should be at daggers drawn with her father, who had behaved more kindly than she yet knew of. I shall never forget her look at these words. 'My father!' — she cried — 'whom do you mean?' My wife told her, and mentioned that he had already paid one bill, besides giving money for her support; and that there was another bill ready for him to pay. I cannot pretend to describe her appearance while my wife was speaking, or to

repeat what she said, when she had done. I never saw anything to equal it in a tragedy on the stage. But who do you think the old gentleman was? Her father? Not a bit of it—he was no other than the very person who wanted to marry her, when she ran away with Lieutenant Bagot; old Lord Astonford—old enough to be her grandfather, as I said.’ ”

“ Lord Astonford ! ” exclaimed Cameron.

“ You may guess I was as much thunder-struck,” replied Aston, “ as Peter, ‘ poor soul,’ when I heard this name; and I had some difficulty in only saying ‘ *indeed!* ’ at the mention of it.”

“ Lord Astonford ! ” repeated Cameron.

“ Yes,” said Aston, “ no other than my worthy relative, who passes for the most confirmed woman-hater in all England; a character he assumed, I fancy, after this very business; as if he thought he could persuade the world it was spleen, not years, which made him renounce the sex.”

“ And are you sure it was the same ? ”

“ Quite sure—for I have often heard of his

being jilted, almost on the eve of his wedding day, by a young lady of high birth and family, who was so perverse as to prefer a handsome young fellow, with nothing but his commission, to a feeble old peer, with nothing but his peerage. The name of the lady, if it was ever mentioned, has escaped my memory."

"And this was the mother of my Caroline!" exclaimed Cameron with emotion.

"We will talk of that anon. Listen to the melancholy sequel. 'By degrees (continued Skink) everything came out. It appeared that Lord Astonford heard of the departure of Lieutenant Bagot, soon after he went to join his regiment; and when he first called, it was with pretended offers of his best services to make up matters between Mrs. Bagot and her father, as if he had forgiven and forgot the trick she had played him. But at last the cloven foot peeped out; he wanted her to be false to her husband. Ah—it was a bad business, and I wish I had done what I promised—never let him into the house again. But Mrs. Skink, poor soul! who always did every-

thing for the best, and thought that if we dis-obliged his lordship, we should see no more of his money, would never allow that it became people to be uncivil to persons who had done nothing uncivil to them. This seemed reasonable, yet it was not quite the thing. However, I was too easy, and agreed that if his lordship came again, we would not affront him.

“ ‘ He *did* come, and very soon. It was one evening, after dark ; he came on foot, with a single knock ; and asked to see Mrs. Skink. I was not at home ; nor do I think I ever knew the rights of what passed between them ; except that he inveigled her, poor soul, into a plot which was carried on for several months. But you’ll excuse me if I just skim over this part ; for I don’t like to think of it, much less talk about it. The fact is, my poor wife was over persuaded to do whatever Lord Astonford wished ; and what with threatening to turn Mrs. Bagot out of doors, if she did not pay what she owed, carrying messages and letters from Lord Astonford, offering his purse if she would accept it, and other ugly doings, she

was taken in labour before her time, and died the third day after she had given birth to a daughter.' ”

“The fiends!” exclaimed Cameron. “But how did they escape punishment? And how did your honourable relative contrive to hide himself from the sword of her injured husband?”

“I fancy,” replied Aston, “it will be better I should here drop our friend Peter, and tell you the rest (which I got at by a series of close and pertinacious questions) in my own person. The scheme of my honourable relative (as you call him), after his dishonourable proposals were indignantly repulsed by the unhappy lady, was founded upon the sordid expectation that necessity would yield what love and virtue united had scornfully refused; and he found in Mrs. Skink a *Lilith* or *She-Devil* to work for him. Gold was the tempting bait; and I have reason to believe it was profusely employed. Every mode of persecution which vulgar rapacity could be supposed to exercise over a timid and helpless female who imagined

herself destitute and forsaken, was resorted to. I say forsaken ; for one part of this diabolical plot, which devolved upon Skink himself, was to intercept all letters that came from Lieutenant Bagot, and all which she wrote to him ; so that his miserable wife believed he had either fallen in battle, or that some untoward accident prevented him from answering her earnest supplications for an immediate remittance. In the distraction of her situation, she even wrote to her father ; but this too was intercepted ; and she was left to imagine that he was inexorable. Thus beset with difficulties, the whole of which had been artfully created by my honourable lord, and his hired satellites, she was further doomed to endure the insulting insinuations, that she might escape them all, by accepting the proffered aid of Lord Astonford ; while, on two or three occasions, Skink's beldame of a wife, went so far as to admit him to her presence, when his degrading proposals were no doubt repeated. Picture to yourself a high-born, delicate, inexperienced, timid young creature, so circum-

stanced, and you will have no difficulty in understanding how she should grow at last delirious, and in that state become an untimely mother with the sacrifice of her own life,—for such was the damning issue.”

“What a comfort it would be to me at this moment,” observed Cameron, coolly, “if that said Mrs. Skink had been alive the night we slept at the Black Bull! I am not ferocious; but I think I should have felt more sorrow at accidentally shooting a cobbler’s dog, than making a hole in her carcass *by mistake*. And that unhangd, withered, lampoon upon death; that gripe-fist, that muckworm, that lean compound of cant and sin, old Skink, who rather than let us depart and spend our money at an honest man’s house, would have crammed his dead wife into the pigsty (and no disparagement to her if he had), why was I not too much frightened to know what I was about, and so have executed blind justice upon him too?”

“I have a little more to tell you,” said Aston, “when you have vented all your

spleen. While the unfortunate lady lay a corpse, Lieutenant Bagot's agent called, in consequence of having received an urgent letter from him expressive of his distress at not hearing from her. His fear was, that her family, availing themselves of his absence, had employed foul means for removing her to a place of concealment, some convent or nunnery abroad, perhaps, where she could neither receive, nor write, letters. You may be sure this person had a fraudulent tale palmed upon him; so that in all probability the late Major Bagot never knew, to the hour of his own death, the real circumstances which had caused that of his beloved wife. The agent took upon himself to give the necessary orders for her funeral; placed her infant under the care of a nurse till its father's return; and sealed up and removed, as much property, in the shape of clothes, trinkets, &c. as the liberality of Skink and his wife suffered to appear."

"And what became of the reptiles themselves?" inquired Cameron.

"I had such a loathing of superfluous con-

versation with him," replied Aston, "that I asked no questions upon that head. Obviously, he would quit London as soon as he could; and I suppose his employer furnished him with the means, it being equally his interest to get him out of the way. But, in what obscure corner he skulked, till he became landlord of the Black Bull, or whether he entered at once upon his present calling, I know not. I must not forget to add, however, that I am the bearer of a small packet of letters for Miss Bagot; the intercepted letters of her deceased parents; the seals of which Skink was prudent enough not to break. Why he kept them, I did not inquire; but received them with a promise that they should be safely conveyed to their destination."

"They are most extraordinary circumstances," observed Cameron, after a short pause; "yet I hardly perceive how they can benefit me."

"Shall I tell you what my *own* course would be, were I situated exactly as you are?"

"Yes."

“ Well, then, listen. You love Miss Bagot. Discarding all the frippery of romance, your feelings tell you how much your future happiness or misery depends upon the prosperous or adverse course of your love. But is this all? Have you only *yourself* to consider? Is it your own misery or happiness which is alone at issue? No. You have called into a new state of existence one who can live in that state only by your side; and who if you now put her from you, droops to decay. Bind *yourself* to the stake, if it so please you, and brave its torments; but where do you get your right to bind this innocent victim along with you? Why should *she* suffer the penalty of *your* infirm nature? Why is *she* to be immolated for *your* ends? And, as *you cannot* go to the stake without dragging her thither — as it is no single martyrdom you dare — ask yourself, is there no duty that holds you back?”

“ You forget,” said Cameron—

“ No,” interrupted Aston, “ I do not forget that you shrink from offending as a son; and *I* am not the man, my dear Cameron, to question

lightly the sanctity of that feeling. We owe our parents much ; but I know of no law, no precept, commanded or inculcated by religion or morality, which says, we owe them a bond of tears, the obedience of broken hearts, the submission which chains us to a destiny where grief digs our grave quicker than the hours appointed to conduct us to it. You tell me, you have not yet spoken upon the subject either to Sir Everton or Lady Frances. I would delay doing so no longer. They love you ; they are proud of you ; they wish, they must wish your happiness. Show them how alone they can make you happy. Vindicate yourself from the suspicion of having yielded to a vain and trifling impulse, which you mistake for a passion that has mastered all your affections, by recounting the long, the honourable, the manly struggle you have ineffectually made. The eloquence of nature, inspired by such a theme, will scatter before it, like ocean-spray before the tempest, all cold and worldly considerations, all desires or resolves founded merely upon a derivative augmentation of

wealth or influence. Be assured, when the alternative is once frankly and affectionately offered to them, they will not long hesitate between seeing you the happy husband of Miss Bagot, blending filial gratitude with connubial felicity, and the venal, prostituted partner of a wife, bidden for as you would cheapen a commodity, whose only value lay in its money price. You cannot fail. But say you do — Why, then, most solemnly I declare, you acquire that moment the right —”

“Say no more,” interrupted Cameron, who had listened with profound attention to every word, “say no more! You have armed me with such motives for the course you advise, that I should be ashamed of my own weakness could I pause. I go to meditate upon the means; and it shall be done.”

CHAPTER XV.

Parent's lawes must bear no weight
When they happinesse prevent.

HABINGTON'S *Castara*.

CAMERON did *not* pause. That same day he sought, or rather, made an opportunity for speaking both to Sir Everton and Lady Azle-dine. His appeal to their parental feelings was respectful, but firm. He reasoned, persuaded, entreated. He urged every argument likely to overcome the objections that were brought forward, every circumstance calculated to awaken pity for his situation. He disguised nothing; spoke proudly of Caroline's virtues, and impatiently of the prejudices which denied them their proper influence. He glanced, too, at the discovery accidentally made by Aston, of her descent from a noble

lineage ; and asked, what real addition could be made to her merits were she the heiress of an empire ? In short, he said everything that could be inspired by a lover pleading for his heart's dearest hopes ; and with tears declared, that unless he were permitted to look forward to a union with her, he might indeed obey their injunctions, but he knew, too well, at what price he should do so. The negative obedience of *not marrying* he could perhaps yield to ; but his nature would revolt from going further. He must cease to be what he was, before he could ever submit to call himself the husband of one woman, while his heart, and every affection that animated it, belonged to another.

It is pretty certain, had Sir Everton's scruples been all that stood in his way, he would have succeeded : the Baronet's love of ease, and love of his son, would have triumphed over his prudential objections. Besides, his mind acknowledged the force of many of Cameron's arguments ; and he had, moreover, a very sincere respect for the amiable character

of Caroline. But Lady Frances was steady to her purpose, though mild in her assertion of it. In spite of whatever Cameron could say, she affected to believe he was misled in supposing that what he felt for Caroline was really love ; ascribed it merely to the effect of daily intercourse ; almost ridiculed the notion that she could be in love with him ; and predicted, that a few weeks of separation would convince them both of the truth of the homely adage, " out of sight out of mind."

The more warmly Cameron repelled these insinuations, the more confirmed her ladyship appeared to be in their justice, taking as her proof, the very zeal he displayed in denying them. Sometimes she rallied his vehemence ; sometimes reproved it, mingling with her reproof haughty expostulations upon what she called the humility of his passion. Lastly, she tried the effect of maternal exhortation, tenderly urging him to renounce a connexion which, if it ripened into what he wished, must destroy every hope she had cherished for years.

It was when she talked thus, that Cameron

found himself most vulnerable ; it was then he faltered in resolution : and if he could have forgotten that Caroline must suffer along with him, it was then he would have consented to bear his own sufferings for his mother's sake. But he never once swerved from his declaration, that with his present feelings, *no other woman could become his wife*. Upon that point he was inflexible, as much from a sentiment of honourable pride which forbade deception, as from devotion to his love, which forbade apostasy.

He had but little cause to congratulate himself upon the result of his experiment ; yet he rejoiced that it had been made. His real situation was no longer a secret ; and though not naturally of a sanguine disposition, he consoled himself with the hope, that further reflection might gradually soften the repugnance of both Sir Everton and Lady Frances to the match. Nor could he forget what they had both admitted ; that were they *convinced* (a difficult operation, be it remembered, when persons are already convinced it is not their interest to *be*

convinced,) his future happiness really depended upon his union with Caroline, they would at once sacrifice their inclinations to his. Even this fragile tenure was preferable to the utter hopelessness of his previous condition.

On the third day after Aston's arrival, Caroline left her room, and joined the family at breakfast. She was pale; and bore about her the traces of a debilitating indisposition; but her manner exhibited an enforced gaiety painful to witness. Her smile was cold, her cheerfulness sad, her animated denial of present illness, most melancholy. As she shook hands with Aston, she expressed her delight at seeing *him* again, and at his intention, as she had learned from Arabella, of remaining. Aston said something, in reply, about the additional pleasure he should experience during his stay, from her society; when she answered, in a voice audible only to himself, "you have a friend who will want a friend's counsel. Give it him—*I* entreat you."

At that moment Cameron entered the room. Their distress and embarrassment were mutual.

If he was shocked to see her altered looks, she was no less so, to observe his anxious and harassed countenance. He stammered out a few confused words of congratulation upon her recovery, and then strove to conceal his agitation by entering into conversation with Aston.

The deportment of Lady Frances was kind; but Caroline felt it as the kindness of condescension only, if not of pity. Her reception by Sir Everton was far different — full of genuine warmth and cordiality, and testifying that at that moment he had no other remembrance of the past than that she was an orphan, her deceased father his friend, his house her asylum, and her re-appearance in the family circle a token of the indisposition which had withdrawn her from it during the last few days.

Cameron could hardly forgive the jealous vigilance with which Caroline, from this time, shunned every hazard of being alone with him. He did not know that the more immediate cause of her doing so, was a promise exacted from her by Lady Frances, (though probably,

without any promise, her own feelings would have prompted the same course,) and he thought it partook of obstinacy, if not cruelty. Arabella, meanwhile, abated none of her kind offices as a messenger between the separated lovers. Day after day, and week after week, she was the bearer of many an impassioned letter to her unhappy friend, who received, read, and wept over them, but could not be prevailed upon to answer one. Cameron would sometimes applaud this as a noble delicacy ; at others he condemned it as morbid refinement.

It was during this interval that Aston sought an opportunity of delivering into her hands the packet he had received from Skink ; relating, at the same time, (but with the most delicate reserve upon some points,) so much of what had passed between them, as was necessary to explain its history. Caroline was not wholly ignorant of her wretched mother's persecutions. Her father had often glanced at the melancholy tale ; and since his death, she had found among his papers a letter,

(written no doubt by his agent), describing what the writer had learned upon calling at the house where she died. This letter reached her father upon the eve of a battle; for she found, added to it in his own hand, a few distracted sentences, dated midnight, expressing the anguish of his mind, and the hope that he might survive the next day's engagement, only to revenge himself upon her oppressors, and protect the infant she had left behind.

The packet contained seven letters, four of which were from her mother to her father, and two from him. The other was addressed to Mrs. Bagot's own father, the Earl of Ackerill; a heart-rending appeal, which surely must have prevailed had it ever reached him; for what a picture did it draw of the poor sufferer's destitute condition, and the humiliating insults to which she was hourly exposed! In those to her husband, though there was not a word that could criminate Lord Astonford, by name, she alluded darkly to persecutions which she said were too horrible to mention, and implored him to return and rescue her from them.

The last letter she ever wrote, contained her wedding-ring. It was probably written on the day she died ; as she spoke of having given birth prematurely to a daughter, then sleeping by her side. It was incoherent, and scarcely legible in many parts, for which she apologized, complaining of the difficulty of writing in bed. She said she “ knew she was dying, but could not bear the idea that the ring he had placed upon her hand at the altar should be polluted by the grave and the earth-worm, or pass into the possession of the wretches by whom she was surrounded.” Towards the conclusion she seemed to have grown more feeble, for the letters were more and more faintly traced, while only half the last word “ fare—” was written. Caroline’s tears fell fast upon the paper as she pressed it to her lips, and with reverential fervour kissed the almost faded memorial of an expiring mother’s sorrows.

While thus absorbed in grief, Arabella entered, and with a mingled expression of joy and sadness in her countenance, announced that her uncle had just arrived. This was

welcome news ; for so long a time had elapsed since she wrote without any answer being received, that her harassed spirit began to yield to the most gloomy misgivings. The cause of her disappointment was simply this. When the General received her epistle, perceiving it to be somewhat long, and written in a very fine crow-quill hand, he put it into his waistcoat pocket to read after dinner ; instead of which he went to sleep ; but at the end of three weeks, happening to put on the same waistcoat again, he found it where he had left it, and set to work in good earnest, reading it twice over. In less than an hour from the second reading, he was on his road to Azledine Hall.

“ We shall soon lose you now, I suppose,” said Arabella, sorrowfully ; and the eyes of the affectionate girl filled with tears as she spoke.

“ You will *never* lose me, my dear, dear Arabella,” exclaimed Caroline, embracing her : “ *never*, while I live ! But we shall be separated—and ask your own heart if *that* can be avoided ? ”

“ And poor Cameron ——.”

“ For God’s sake,” she exclaimed, “ do not breathe a syllable that may turn my thoughts that way ;” and hastily quitted the room to seek the General.

“ Well, my girl,” said he, marching up to her, as she entered, and taking her hand to lead her to a chair by his side,—“ Well, my girl, I have come to your relief at last, and mean to carry you off with colours flying. I dare say you began to think I was no man of my word. But that confounded Humphrey, who has the care of my wardrobe, and just gives me what he likes to wear, kept me so long in one waistcoat, (because, as he said, it was cool for the dog days,) that I never saw the other, in which I had put your letter, for three weeks : so no wonder it escaped my memory. However, as I knew you were in good quarters, though you might like to change them, I was not much troubled when I discovered my blunder.”

It did not enter into the General’s head to inquire wherefore Caroline wished to withdraw

herself from the Hall; and this indifference saved her from all embarrassing explanations. It would have distressed her to hint at unkindness as the reason; but it would have distressed her still more to acknowledge the cause of that unkindness. It was a further relief to her mind to learn that her uncle proposed returning in a few hours, in consequence of the necessity he was under of going to London the following day. The moment of separation having arrived, she anxiously desired to shorten the interval.

She had another and still more painful motive for wishing this. It so happened that Cameron and Aston were out, with their guns, enjoying a day's sport among the Baronet's preserves. To be spared the dreadful task of bidding the former farewell—a cold, studied, formal farewell, in the presence of his family, in the presence, above all, of Lady Frances, who she knew must inly triumph at this consummation of her desires, was to escape the sharpest part of her trial. But could she go, and leave it to Arabella to convey her parting

words to him? Ah no! She confided to her a letter, every sentence of which was hallowed by her tears.

“Give this to your brother,” said she, as she hung weeping on her bosom, “and implore him from me to believe, that what I have written is irrevocable—that, having had energy enough to bring matters to this crisis, I shall not faint in resolution to perform the rest.”

When Humphrey announced that the carriage was ready, and Lady Frances and Bertha had taken leave of her with more tears than the General either liked or could account for, and Sir Everton had warmly expressed his hope that she would soon return, Arabella took her hand to accompany her to the door. As they proceeded along, she placed in it a small crimson velvet case, and said, in a whisper, “Keep this for my sake!”

“I will,” replied Caroline, kissing her once more, as she spoke; then, stepping into the carriage, followed by her uncle, it drove slowly through that part of the park where Cameron had first declared his passion for

her. The remembrance was maddening ; she wept hysterically ; and seemed so utterly overwhelmed with grief, that the General could not refrain from asking, somewhat abruptly, “ why the devil she wished to leave at all, since it made her so unhappy ? ”

This very natural question, to one in the General's situation, roused Caroline to a sense of her imprudence in thus giving way to feelings which she must henceforth not only conceal, but subdue. With a severe firmness of character, such as she was conscious of being able to exert when occasion called for it, she assumed at once an outward calmness, that made the General conclude he had acted extremely judiciously, in saying what he did.

When Cameron heard that Caroline was gone, (which he first learned from Lady Frances,) the suddenness of the departure alone surprised him ; for he had been in daily expectation of it ; but when his mother ventured to express regret for the event, a cold, scornful smile was his only answer.

Arabella lost not a moment in delivering

the letter Caroline had left for him. He received it with the same unmoved countenance that he did the communication of Lady Frances.

“Did she say nothing?” he inquired.

“Nothing!”

He looked at the seal. It bore an ominous impress; the device of a child trying to grasp a sunbeam, with the motto,—“*Never!*”

“I shall read this,” said he, putting the letter into his pocket, alone; then pressing his sister’s hand, “they have done a wise deed,” he added; “destroyed the root out of their abundant anxiety for the branches.”

“Hope for the best,” exclaimed Arabella, with a sigh, “and make up your mind to the worst.”

“That is,” replied Cameron, with much caustic bitterness, “leap from a precipice, and be prepared for dashing out your brains, if a miracle does not prevent it. What a price to pay for the privilege of not being born under a thatched roof! And how much hap-

pier is the rustic who matches with whom he lists !”

When alone, he perused Caroline’s letter. It ran as follows :—

“The moment is at length come which permits me to give expression to feelings I have hitherto buried in my own bosom.

“When you read what I now write, I shall have ceased to be near you. Why? Because—ah! this is no time for maidenly coyness—because, Cameron, *we love each other!* And, wherefore should our love constrain us to be miserable? Because in their eyes, who have the power to make us so, I am possessed of a treasure which they deem me all too unworthy to enjoy.

“Alas! I know my unworthiness; no one better. But, should I not add to it, were I to attempt retaining what others have a right to forbid? I am the disposer of my *own* heart only; I have bestowed it—irrevocably; but you may believe me when I add, I have never admitted the delusion of supposing I had made an exchange.

“Do not misinterpret me. Were you as I am—an orphan—sole master of yourself; or, were you as portionless as I—then, Cameron, I should know we had *exchanged* hearts as truly as now I know they have been given; as certainly as now, I restore *thy* gift, which made me proud in the receiving, amid all the sad forebodings of what was to follow.

“Yes, Cameron! the troubled dream of the last few months is over: and *I*, with my poor weak woman's spirit, must help *you* to break through its enchantment. Accomplish the ambitious hopes of your mother, the just expectations of your father; be to them a son in whom they may rejoice—gather fresh honours round the name of Azledine—transmit them through illustrious blood. This duty, the condition of your birth imposes. Perform it. Lay up for yourself the treasure beyond price, the knowledge that you walk in the blessings of a parent.

“Farewell!—farewell! A time may come when I dare think of you. Think of *me* meanwhile, as of one already dead; for though it may

be I have many years to live, and though while I live I shall be thine—thine only, yet am I henceforth but a memory to thee.”

“Incomparable creature!” exclaimed Cameron. “The sacrifice shall *not* be all thy own—no other woman shall ever call me husband—I swear it—and be witness, Heaven, of my oath!”

CHAPTER XVI.

Fair amorist : what, dost thou think
To taste love's honey, and not drink
One dram of gall ? Or, to devour
A world of sweet, and taste no sour?

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

CAROLINE corresponded regularly with Arabella, and sometimes, in fulfilment of her promise, with Lady Frances. Her letters to the latter spoke only of gratitude for past kindnesses, of present pursuits, of the General's domestic economy, of the increasing improvement of his son's malady, and every other common-place matter which is hunted for when we know we have a sheet of paper to fill without feeling any desire to fill it with what most interests ourselves.

To Arabella she wrote in a far different

strain, for without once mentioning the name of Cameron, or alluding distinctly to her constant, secret grief, she poured forth every thought, yielded to every emotion which the recollection of both inspired. They were such sad and melancholy letters, denoting so evidently a mind that had foregone all cheerfulness, and was hopelessly resigned to misery for the rest of its pilgrimage on earth, that Arabella never read one of them without sinking into despondency herself.

The second she received (about a fortnight after her departure) commenced with these words :—

“ It was not till this morning that I opened the little velvet case you placed in my hand as I was stepping into the carriage. You would have pitied me, could you have witnessed the effect of your cruel kindness. It called forth the *only tears I have shed* since I have been here. And yet, though I know I must weep whenever I trust myself to look upon it, it has already become a treasure that I would not part with for worlds. But never,

never let the knowledge of its being mine escape you. Then can I be secretly happy in the possession of it !”

The “cruel kindness” complained of was a portrait of Cameron in his academical dress, which he had had painted while at Oxford, for the sole pleasure of giving it to his favourite sister. To no other human being (nor even to Caroline, except under the actual circumstances) would Arabella have parted with it. Receiving it as some trinket, and considering it nothing more, she felt no impatience to ascertain of what quality or description it was. On the morning in question, however, as she was about to place it in a small cabinet where she kept some reliques of her deceased father, and where she intended putting the letters of her mother, which Aston had delivered to her, she opened it, when, instead of a pearl necklace or jewelled brooch, her eyes rested upon the almost speaking features of her heart’s idol !

The surprise, not unmingled with painful joy, overcame her. She could hardly have

been more agitated at the moment had Cameron himself unexpectedly stood before her. She gazed at it several minutes in silence, during which her thoughts travelled back to self-forbidden recollections of so mournful a character that her tears flowed in spite of herself; but they were, as she told Arabella, the first she had shed since that burst of violent anguish in passing through Azledine Park, which had called forth the somewhat rough rebuke of her uncle. Still she gazed and wept; and then with shrinking, as if she almost expected there was life in them, pressed her lips to those mimic ones, held them there, and blushed at her own boldness.

The miniature, however, escaped the fate intended for the supposed trinket. Instead of reposing with the reliques of the dead in her little antique cabinet, it was suspended from a gold chain, and reposed next her heart; the living cabinet, where she had enshrined the original.

Could Cameron have known this; could some good genius have revealed the precious

knowledge of it to *his* heart, how it would have softened some of the sharpest pangs it was enduring! How it would have soothed the disappointment he felt when all the passionate entreaties of a letter he had written to Caroline in answer to the one she left with Arabella, failed to produce a reply. To have known that she had his portrait, that she had wept over it, kissed it, and wore it at her heart, would not only have sealed her pardon for this inflexible silence, but checked many a silent upbraiding which the impatient waywardness of love cast upon coldness and indifference, instead of recognising the proud firmness of an exalted nature.

Lady Frances, meanwhile, found less cause than she could have wished, to rejoice in the separation she had brought about; for maternal anxieties of another description had succeeded. A settled melancholy began to show itself in Cameron; not so much by looks as by manner. His cheek lost none of its colour, his eye none of its fire; neither did involuntary sighs betray that he was unhappy. Pride

and manliness equally preserved him from all these effeminate tokens of sorrow. But he grew daily more and more solitary in his habits; shunned the society of his family, and even that of Aston; and, when with them, no longer participated, as he was wont to do, in their conversation, amusements, or occupations.

His deportment, indeed, seemed the visible expression of this sort of feeling, that he had submitted, as he said he would, to the wishes of others, and having done so, he had done all he could; they must not expect him to wreath his chains with flowers, or dance to their clank. He was, in truth, the less likely to do so, because, independently of the grief which he really felt, he could not get rid of the reflection that a hard measure had been dealt to him by those who ought to have found their own chief happiness in his. A felicity within his reach had been snatched away; he mourned its loss; and nature herself rebels when we would caress the hand that wounds us.

Sir Everton already regretted that he had thwarted his son's affection, and would wil-

lingly have retraced his steps, seeing what was likely to be the consequence ; but Lady Frances continued firm to her first opinion, that protracted absence would obliterate every vestige of the light summer love between Cameron and Caroline ; a love which she was sure had taken no root, but had blossomed merely from the evanescent influence of circumstances. And with a view to assist absence, she earnestly proposed that they should pass the coming winter in London, where there would be a thousand new attractions, with abundant opportunities of throwing Cameron into that society which might lead to the accomplishment of what they (or at any rate, what she) so vehemently desired, an alliance with some distinguished family.

The Baronet yielded reluctantly to this matrimonial scheme of her ladyship, but he did yield ; and before the country had entirely put off all its beauty, the whole family, save Mr. Flinn and Mrs. Kilpin, were transplanted to the banks of the Thames. It was Cameron's first visit to the metropolis : till then he had

never been nearer to it than Oxford. Aston became his cicerone; and for a time Sir Everton was almost a convert to one part at least of Lady Frances' predictions. The amazing contrast between the capital and an academic or rural life, the magnitude and novelty of the objects by which he was surrounded, their incessant stimulus to curiosity, added to the din and turmoil of the huge vortex, drove him, in spite of himself, at first, out of his lonely devotions to the cherished memory of Caroline.

But this was all. When curiosity was satiated, and novelty had lost its gloss, London had no more power to make him what he *had* been, than Azledine Park; while to the extreme disappointment and no less extreme mortification of Lady Frances, he positively refused to accept an invitation to dinner at the house of a Scotch marquis, whose eldest daughter had twice danced with him. The fact was, he saw too clearly the match-making designs of his mother, as well as the whole drift of this sudden journey; and disgust was not the only armour he wore (though it was a strong

and sufficient one,) to protect him from being bought and sold in the mart for husbands.

Their residence in the metropolis presented an opportunity, which was not neglected, of cultivating a personal intimacy with Aston's father, who very early intimated to his son, (and soon after to Sir Everton and Lady Frances,) how much reason he had to be delighted at the prospect of his union with Arabella; an intimation which quickened Aston's dutiful inclinations to obtain for his father the immediate enjoyment of his anticipated pleasure. But in affairs of this kind women love procrastination, either because they are more sensible than men of the solemn and irrevocable step they are about to take, and so take it fearfully, (for it is most certain that the change from spinster to matron is a more entire transformation than from bachelor to husband,) or else because being the last, often the only, serious matter in which they can expect to have an absolute will of their own, they are loth to divest themselves of so seductive a prerogative.

Arabella was not inclined to wave her rights on the present occasion; the consequence was that the marriage day was deferred till their return to Azledine Hall, as the very earliest at which it could possibly be thought of; and from that moment Cameron found on all occasions a potent ally in Aston whenever the conversation happened to turn upon the superior attractions of a country over a town life.

We have not said so much as we ought, perhaps, of the progress which Aston made in bringing the matter to this bearing, after he came back as the accredited suitor of Arabella, by virtue of his father's approbation; but the fact is, auspicious love presents no materials for fine writing. When everything is consenting to the one great object; when every day is sunshine and peace; and when, from the moral constitution of the lady and gentleman, there is no room even for those self-created torments which the happiest love will sometimes perversely invent, what more can the historian of such a passion

do than record that they fell in love, continued in love, and in the due ripening of their love, married? We offer this as the only apology (and an adequate one it is) for our saying no more up to the present moment, of the even, unruffled tenor of Aston and Arabella's courtship.

At length a letter was received by Mr. Flinn, desiring him to have everything in readiness, the fires lighted, the beds aired, and the furniture uncovered, for the reception of the family on a day named. Four months had been passed in London, and to what end? Either the smoke-fraught air of the capital, or its irregularities, or the longer operation of deeply seated feelings, or all these causes in their several degrees, but most of all the last, had begun to make serious inroads upon the health of Cameron, whose altered appearance was now a source of increased alarm to both Lady Frances and Sir Everton; and he who had been hurried from the country covertly in search of lost tranquillity was, by the advice of an eminent physician, ordered

back to it again for the recovery of health. A passive instrument on both occasions, he still, however, prepared with more alacrity for re-visiting Azledine Park, than he did for making his first acquaintance with the metropolis.

The day before they quitted London, Aston, accompanied by a friend, (not Cameron, for how could he ask *him*?) paid a visit to Doctors Commons: and the day after their arrival at the Hall, he walked with Sir Everton down to the rectory, where he made a very interesting communication to Dr. Dankes.

Arabella had been kept in ignorance of the first occurrence, but not of the second. It was plain, however, from certain overt acts of her own, (to say nothing of others by Lady Frances and Bertha,) that she had what the law would call a guilty knowledge of whatever treasons might be hatching by Aston. These overt acts consisted chiefly of secret meetings with milliners, mercers, mantua-makers, and jewellers, before she quitted London; and of active preparations, after quitting it, for some expected event of no common kind.

Among other evidences may be mentioned the fact that Bertha was seen trying how Cæsar, the old house dog, would look, with a large white satin bow fastened on the right side of his newly-cleaned brass collar.

In plainer language—or rather in the prescriptive language of such matters, — the “happy day was fixed,” and many happy hearts besides the two that were of course the happiest, looked forward to its coming with an utter oblivion of the proverbial uncertainty of all human calculations. Mrs. Kilpin felt as assured that she should cut up the bridecake on the ensuing Thursday, as she did that she had succeeded in making one of the best bridecakes that ever was, or ever would be made; and honest old Judiah would not have betted his tobacco stopper against a whole year’s wages, that he should not carouse to the healths of the new-married couple at the head of the long table, which was to be laid for the tenants, in the cherry-tree gallery.

Alas! that bridecake was eaten in sorrow; and Judiah lived to see the cherry-tree gal-

lery the scene, many a time, of riotous profligacy ere it became the witness of detected guilt !

The evening that should have ushered in the nuptial morn, ushered in a mystery. A horseman arrived from London with a letter for Aston. He had travelled hard, and was weary with fatigue ; but his almost exhausted frame was, seemingly, revived by the intelligence, that he had accomplished his journey before the marriage had taken place.

The letter, of which he was the bearer, Aston read with indescribable consternation. It was as follows :—

“ MY DEAR EDWARD,

“ It is with the utmost distress of mind I find myself compelled to *forbid your union* with Miss Arabella Azledine, till circumstances which I have learned, only within this hour, are explained. I forbear to mention what they are, reserving them for a personal communication, which I desire you will enable me to have with the least possible delay after the

receipt of this. Indeed, I have neither time nor spirits to enter into them now, for the shock which the intelligence has caused me is greater than I can describe, knowing, as I do, what *your* feelings must be on the occasion, to say nothing of my deep regret for the young lady herself and her family. But I had no choice ; the stern duty was imposed on me ; and the only consolation I can find at the present moment is in the hope that what I have heard may prove unfounded. Should it unfortunately be otherwise, I cannot doubt that, upon reflection, you will yourself acknowledge the painful necessity of renouncing all thoughts of the intended alliance.

“ My dear Edward,

“ Your affectionate father,

“ G. ASTON.”

Aston had broken the seal of this terrible communication in the presence of Arabella and the family, with whom he was sitting when he received it ; and it had been as easy for him not to stagger under the sudden blow

of a heavy club, as to have concealed the agitation produced by its perusal. Delicacy towards Sir Everton and Lady Frances, however, tenderness towards his affianced bride, and justice to all parties, at once counselled him the course he had to pursue. A short, but severe struggle with himself enabled him to follow this counsel.

“Here is a summons,” said he, folding up the letter, “which I must instantly obey. My father desires me not to lose a moment in setting off for London.”

His faltering voice, and quivering lip as he spoke, required not the addition of his disturbed air, and suddenly pale cheek, to notify that the summons was both urgent and distressing.

“For London!” exclaimed Sir Everton, simultaneously almost with Lady Frances, Cameron, and Bertha.

Arabella alone was silent. She looked earnestly at Aston. She would fain have read the purport of the letter in his countenance; but a dimness came over her, and she trem-

bled violently. Aston perceived it not, for he had not yet dared to look at *her*.

"God in heaven only knows wherefore!" he continued, covering his face with his hands, and leaning against the window at which he was standing; "but this I know, every minute *now* that is not spent upon the journey must lengthen the agony I shall feel till I return; so, wonder not at what I say."

"Wait till the morning," said Sir Everton.

"No, no, no," replied Aston, "I could not bear such a morrow *here* as must now come. I could not trust myself, if it did find me here—I should—but pray, pardon me further speech; when I return you shall know all, only believe that I am under a necessity which leaves me no choice between going instantly or not at all."

"Let me go with you," said Cameron, taking hold of his hand.

"No."

"Yes!" murmured Arabella, "yes—it will be better: *I* shall be happier."

This was enough. The next moment Cameron, at the earnest desire of Aston, left the room to give directions for having their horses saddled. Without saying a word, Sir Everton, Lady Frances, and Bertha also quitted the apartment. Aston and Arabella were alone.

“I do not ask to know what it is that causes this cruel separation!” she exclaimed, as Aston drew her gently towards him, and she threw herself weeping into his arms, “but for my sake, Aston, take care of yourself. I can bear your absence if I may be assured you will return to me in safety.”

“In safety!” repeated Aston. “What, then, does my Arabella fancy I am feigning an excuse to hide a danger? For shame! love! Trust me, I would not so deceive you. On my honour, it *is* a letter from my father, a distracting one, I need not say,—a mysterious one,—but no otherwise fraught with danger than as it tears me from you at a moment like this; and what mind might not sink under such a visitation?”

“ Then go, my dear Edward, and spare me the only misery you can till I see you again, that of prolonging this bitter moment of parting. Go at once,—and Heaven, Heaven bless you !”

He obeyed. Straining her to his bosom, he kissed her fervently and tore himself away.

In less than an hour he and Cameron were on their road to London, and Arabella was weeping on her pillow ; but before the reader can become acquainted with what happened after their arrival, or what had induced Aston’s father to summon him there, he must accompany the fugitives from Black Rock, and learn what Andrew Mayfield had been about.

CHAPTER XVII.

And it was told Joshua, saying, the five kings are found hid in a cave at Makkedah.

And Joshua said, roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep them.

Joshua, ch. x. v. 17, 18.

THE fugitives from Black Rock steered their course for Lynn, their first destination; and while upon their voyage, Stephen became acquainted with the circumstances which had rendered their sudden flight a matter of prudence.

It appeared that a gentleman who was out with the hounds, passed through that part of the wood where the bodies of Rutherford and Tapper were buried. Perceiving the dogs make a sudden stop at a particular spot where the earth had been recently turned up, and that he could

not call them off, he rode back, when he found them snuffing and scratching over the grave.

The disappearance of the two men being still fresh in his recollection, together with the rumours that they had been murdered in this very wood, his suspicions were so far excited that he communicated them to one of the magistrates, who instantly despatched persons to dig the ground, when the bodies were of course found, but in so putrid a state that they could be recognised only by their clothes.

The inquiry after the murderers was now pursued with redoubled eagerness, and many persons were apprehended; among others, Roger Payne and his ostler. The former stuck to his first account, that the men had been at his house on the Sunday morning in question, that he left them there when he went to church, and that they were not there when he returned. But the latter began to stumble in his evidence, and his prevarications were so gross, that he was committed to gaol. This had a wonderful effect in refreshing his memory. The next day he told all he knew,

with the exception of whatever would criminate either himself or his master.

It so chanced that he was unacquainted with the names of any of the Black Rock gang, save those of Kilvert, Nichol Ramsay, and Kenneth Hossack; and as to their abode, when pressed on that point, he declared he did not think any but themselves and the Devil could tell anything about it. Upon this information, three several rewards of two hundred pounds each, were offered for the apprehension of the three individuals whose names had been thus obtained.

The first knowledge Kilvert had of his danger, was while walking through the streets of Horsham on the morning of the day preceding their sudden flight from Black Rock. Perceiving a crowd of persons standing in front of the Town-hall he joined them. They were reading the large printed bills containing the above reward. The names of himself and associates were set forth in staring capitals, with a personal description, too correct to be either flattering or agreeable.

As he stood, apparently reading the placard with great attention, he noticed a sudden movement in the crowd, accompanied with a buzz of whispering voices. He looked round. Every eye was fixed upon himself: but not a muscle of his face moved; not a feature betrayed surprise or agitation. He directed his eyes again towards the bill, and read aloud the description: "Ellic Kilvert, about fifty, hard-featured, dark eyes, tall, powerfully built, a little bald on the top of the head." Lifting his hat with one hand, and feeling the crown of his head with the other, "It is well *I* am known for an honest man," he exclaimed, half laughing, — "or I might chance to put two hundred pounds into some other honest man's pocket, for I don't think the description of Mr. Ellic Kilvert, whoever he is, a bad one of myself — is it?" he continued, addressing a blacksmith who stood near, and was evidently surveying him with a most scrutinizing eye.

"No—I 'll be d—d if it is, friend," replied the blacksmith, in a tone which indicated that he thought it marvellously applicable.

“ Well—” added Kilvert, turning upon his heel and walking slowly away—“ if they are guilty of murder, I hope they will be caught, and get what they deserve, for it’s a horrible crime.”

The crowd followed, with a murmur of tongues which convinced him some among them had not been thrown off their suspicions by his intrepid effrontery; but he neither quickened his pace, nor evinced the slightest symptom of surprise. At that moment an old woman, dressed like a farmer’s wife, came up to him, and dropping a curtsy, said, “ I hope I see you well, Mr. Thorngrove—how is all your good family ! ”

Kilvert looked at her, smiled, and with a familiar nod, replied, “ Pure and hearty, thank you, dame. Who would have thought of seeing you here ? ”

He then entered into conversation with the old woman (still walking carelessly along followed as before), inquired after her husband, her children, and other family matters. Thus he gained the inn yard where he had put up

his horse, which he ordered to be brought out, standing himself at the entrance, and carrying on a familiar conversation with the humble friend he had so unexpectedly met. The people, meanwhile, began to grow ashamed of their injurious thoughts of Mr. Thorngrove, though not one among them knew who the old woman was.

At length the horse was brought. "Tell your husband," said he, as he mounted, "that I shall be down in his neighbourhood in about a week, and will call upon him."

"Thank you, sir," she replied, dropping another curtsey, — "he'll be main glad of the honour of seeing you."

Kilvert rode away, carelessly walking his horse, and looking deliberately from side to side, till he was through the turnpike at the extremity of the town; then putting spurs to *Saucy Jack*, galloped off to the rendezvous where the rest of the gang had their appointment to meet him.

What followed has partly been told. He imparted to Three Farthing Nick and Black

Kenneth, their peril as well as his own ; arranged the manner of their immediate flight ; gave his instructions to those that remained ; and returned forthwith to Black Rock in the way already described.

The old woman who had thus adroitly facilitated his escape out of Horsham, (for, in the worst extremity, he would either have fought his way out, or sold his life in the attempt,) was the mother of Ned Dymar the smuggler, then lying in Chichester gaol, and against whom the two murdered men were to have appeared as witnesses. She had arrived in Horsham the preceding night, to consult with the attorney who had the management of her son's cause, and to bring him that without which attorneys are proverbially tardy in their movements — a little money. She chanced to be among the crowd when Kilvert joined it ; but, aware of the danger of claiming any acquaintance at such a moment, she shrunk behind, to avoid meeting his eye. When, however, she found the suspicions respecting him growing stronger and stronger,

she bethought her of the contrivance which had succeeded so well, laudably anxious to render service to one who, she believed, had done good service to her son. Kilvert, with that intuitive sagacity which so singularly distinguished him, saw her drift at once, and with consummate presence of mind seconded it in a manner that might well deceive those he wished to deceive.

He had no sooner ridden away, however, than the blacksmith, who could not help thinking he had let two hundred pounds slip through his fingers, addressed her.

“ I say, dame, whereabouts does that same Squire Thorngrove live ? ”

“ Live ? ” she replied ; “ where he does more good to the poor than half the squires who are better able ; at Laylock Farm, three miles t’ other side Chichester.”

“ Humph ! ” growled Vulcan, scratching his head ; “ it ’s a great misfortune for an honest man to be so like a rogue, for I never saw anything more pat than him and that ’ere description. You know him, however, and that ’s

enough ; else, I could have sworn he was either Ellic Kilvert himself, or his twin brother."

"Lord bless you!" said the old woman, "Mr. Thorngrove hasn't got a brother, nor never had; except one who has been dead these ten years; and he wasn't a twin. I know Ellic Kilvert, too, and his aunt, that lives at Chichester; but if it's the same (which I can't believe), that description is no more like him than you are like the Bishop of Canterbury's wife."

Others now joined in the conversation, and she kept them in parley till she thought Kilvert was safely out of the town, when, reflecting that her own situation might be attended with danger, if any untoward accident should lead to the discovery that Squire Thorngrove and Kilvert the smuggler were one, she walked away, finished her business with the lawyer, and left Horsham the same afternoon. Kilvert related this adventure (as they were scudding before a stiff breeze, which blew favourably for the port they wished to make,) with so much humour and quaintness, that bursts of

laughter accompanied the recital. He confessed, however, he was "confoundedly taken a-back" by the blacksmith's rejoinder. Stephen asked him, what he would have done had the blacksmith offered to lay hands upon him, or had he and others attempted to resist his leaving Horsham?

"That's a question, Squire, which no man who has experienced hair-breadth escapes, will ever undertake to answer. You may be sure," he continued, "my thoughts were upon every point of the compass, not knowing from which quarter squalls might come; and I *think*, my mind was made up to show the muzzles of a brace of pistols (which would have kept thrice their number and quality at a respectful distance), till I managed to get across *Saucy Jack*. Once in my saddle, they might have given me chase to their heart's content; I would have looked over my shoulder and laughed at them. But this is mere babble, Squire; for there are a hundred things I might have done, if put to it, not one of which would have been the thing I intended to do, before

being put to it. I only know, they should not have had me till I was not worth the having, except for the two hundred pounds, which is now, it seems, the value of my head to any one but myself."

The wind being not only favourable, but blowing a strong gale the whole way, they reached Lynn that same evening about sunset. Here they considered themselves safe for a day or two, while Kilvert negotiated the sale of the vessel, and purchased horses to pursue their journey. This he lost no time in doing; and on the morning of the fourth day they set forth for the Welsh coast, or rather, a mountain retreat in Cardiganshire. They made across the country, in as direct a line as the roads would admit, diverging somewhat as they approached Herefordshire, with the intention of paying another visit to Azledine Hall (in the person of their former ambassador, Black Kenneth), and levying another contribution of a hundred pounds. But this part of their plan they afterwards abandoned, though in the very neighbourhood, for weighty and sufficient

reasons, which unexpectedly presented themselves.

Wales was Kilvert's natal soil, and Cwm Ystwith had the honour of giving him birth. In that vicinity some of his family still lived, plain, honest folks, who would have hung their heads in shame and grief, had they known how their blood was degenerated in the veins of their kinsman. It was here, Kilvert sought refuge on a former occasion ; but he did not now propose to make himself known, because of his followers, which might awaken suspicion, and because it was possible, though hardly probable, the fame of his deeds would reach even this secluded region ; especially if they who had been able to give his name and the description of his person to the magistrates, were also able to disclose his birth-place, which they might be, for aught he knew in his present ignorance of the informer or informers.

It was in the autumnal season this journey was performed ; and if minds disturbed by guilt *could* feel the blessed influence of nature ; if they *could* find repose in scenes of solitude

and silence; if the stillness of deep groves, placid streams, and woody glens, *could* bring peace, or breathe tranquillity into hearts throbbing with terrors for which there is no opiate in this world, our travellers must have delighted in the wild and picturesque scenery that surrounded them, as they approached the termination of their wanderings.

A more balmy morning, one richer in all the gifts of heaven,—clear, bright, genial, health-dispensing, and joyous,—than that which greeted them the last day, never gladdened the earth; never kindled the imagination of the poet, nature's worshiper, or lent inspiration to the painter's eye. It was on such a morning that they began to wind their way leisurely along the fairy banks of the Rheidol.

They had followed the mazy course of this river, for several miles, when they reached its picturesque falls, where a foaming cataract precipitated itself into a reservoir, which was agitated like the sea, from the violence of the descending waters. Enormous rocks, of strange and fantastic shape, reared themselves on either

side, heightening the savage magnificence of the scene, and harmonizing with the dark hue of the stream. The gloomy grandeur of the whole was relieved only by the glittering foam of the impetuous torrent, lashing itself, as it were, into furious scorn of the obstacles that opposed a vain resistance to its course.

Involuntarily, they paused to gaze upon this sublime spectacle; and wonder grew to admiration. None had language to express feelings which all silently acknowledged; so commanding is the majesty of nature, when she appears in that visible grandeur which declares the Mighty One, whose hand has clothed her in such solemnities.

Kilvert was the first to move; and a sigh burst from him, as if at that moment the memory of his boyhood had swept across his jarring and discordant spirit, whispering to it, "What were you, when in sinless infancy you trod these paths, and with laughing eyes surveyed these scenes? And what are you now, looking on them once again? A man; but the prey of guilty fears; with a heart so

battered, a mind so torn with strife and seared with crime, that though these mountains, woods, and streams, speak not, yet have they a voice of reproach, a silent power to make you retrace the past !”

In this wild spot, amid these savage, yet romantic solitudes, Kilvert intended their pilgrimage should end.

“ Here is our home for a few weeks,” said he, when Mayfield proposed they should pursue their journey, after a halt of half an hour, during which they had refreshed themselves with such fare as their travelling kitchen supplied.

“ What !” exclaimed Three Farthing Nick, in a tone of careless good-humour, “ with no better accommodation than yon grave and bearded goat, who stands surveying us from the top of that jutting crag ; and less than the eagle, which seeks its nest in the highest tops when night approaches ? Well, with all my heart ! Smuggler or mountaineer, it is all the same to me. Anything but stone walls, or that unhealthy climate where you and I first met, Ellic.”

"I love the open air," said Black Kenneth, "and the freedom of nature. It reminds me of my childhood, and those scenes of pastoral innocence and simplicity, in which I was brought up."

"Do you observe that opening in the rock?" continued Kilvert, after a pause of several minutes; "just beyond the jut of the lowest fall of the Mynach?"

They turned their eyes in the direction of Kilvert's hand, and saw what appeared to be a natural recess or hollow; but so narrow, and overgrown with shrubs, that it was scarcely perceptible.

"There," said Kilvert, "is a large cave, once (but not in my memory) the retreat of a band of robbers, whose daring exploits held the inhabitants of these hills in terror. Though their asylum was known, it was many years before they could be taken; for, the entrance admits only one at a time, and that with some difficulty; so they were able to defend themselves against a score of assailants. At last, however, as I have heard old

Roderick Morgan say, (the bold shepherd, he was called, on account of his fearless journeys through these glens when the snow lay deep and perilous,) they committed a desperate murder at Rhayader, and then a body of armed men surrounded the cave, determined to take, or kill them."

"And did they?" inquired Black Kenneth, eagerly.

"They killed them," replied Kilvert, "when they found they could not take them."

"How?"

"Not choosing to enter, (which they knew must prove the certain destruction of every one,) they resolved to execute justice another way, by rolling enormous pieces of rock to the entrance of the cave, so as completely to block it up. Then they kept watch night and day for several weeks, to see that they were not removed, and thus they were all starved to death. Many years after, when the inside of the cave was visited, it was found strewed with their bones, in the different nooks and corners, where they had crawled to die."

"And this same cave," observed Three Farthing Nick, "is to be our lodging?"

"Yes," answered Kilvert; "and comfortable enough you'll find it, when we are once there,—roomy and convenient. Not quite so pleasant as Black Rock, perhaps, but, during this fine weather we shall only want it for sleeping in."

"Have you ever been inside?" inquired Mayfield.

"Many a time, when I was a youngster," replied Kilvert.

"Are any of the bones remaining?" said Susan.

"No, my girl. Some pious person, I don't know who, had them collected, and gave them Christian burial, long before I was born. But suppose we go and look at it, just to be sure that no one is already in possession.

They all rose except Susan, and followed Kilvert. She was left to wait their return; but her heart sickened at the prospect which lay before her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Where 's the nation lives so free
And so merry as do we ?
Be it peace or be it war,
Here at liberty we are,
And enjoy our ease and rest.

Song in Beggars' Bush.

THEY had a difficult passage to make across the bed of the Mynach, among ledges of black conical rocks which shot up above the water fretting it in its course. Fortunately, the river was not very deep in that part, for every one had the benefit of a greater or less submersion before they got over. Nor were the worst of the obstacles they had to encounter even then surmounted. There was a steep shaggy ravine to ascend; and one part of the path, which ran round an almost perpendicular cliff, was so precipitous and narrow, that even a practised

cragsman would have found some difficulty in treading it with safety. Our party crawled upon their knees, clinging by their hands to the brushwood or roots of trees and plants, that grew out of the crevices. One slip, and there was nothing to save them from tumbling headlong into the roaring gulf beneath, where the boiling waters of the Mynach emptied themselves from the stupendous cataract above.

Susan, as she watched their perilous progress, trembling for the safety of all, but especially for that of her father and Stephen, felt that if there were no other access to the cave, she should never be able to reach it. When, however, they had rounded this rugged cliff, they found that if, instead of ascending the ravine, they had passed under a broad projecting crag on the right, they would have come to a flight of irregular steps, hewn out of the solid rock, which led directly to the entrance of the cave. These rude stairs were doubtless the work of the bandits who formerly dwelt here, and contrived for their own safety and accommodation.

The entrance, as Kilvert had described, was so narrow, that only one could pass through it at a time; and when they had done so, the interior was so dark (the light not penetrating more than five or six feet), that they could not satisfy their curiosity. The air was chill and damp; but judging by the echo of their voices and footsteps, the cavern seemed to be both lofty and spacious. They soon quitted it, returned by the flight of rock steps, and crossed, with more ease than before, the rough bed of the river.

A brief consultation was now held as to whether they should make the best shift they could for the ensuing night, or despatch one of their party to Aberystwyth (the nearest town), to purchase a few things which would render their new habitation a little more comfortable than it could be in its present state. It was determined, however, this journey should be deferred till the following day. The weather was warm, the nights moonlight, and they had abundant store of provisions. With the help of their coats and

cloaks they could make up a tolerable substitute for a bed for Susan ; while they themselves could stretch their limbs and go to sleep anywhere.

This point settled, their next consideration was how to convey their baggage (which was not very cumbersome) across the river, and get Susan over. It was determined to ascend the mountain, and cross to the opposite side by the Devil's Bridge, instead of attempting the passage of the Mynach again. They waited, therefore, till the sun was some degrees nearer the west, and then, in the cool of the evening, began their ascent.

A zig-zag path, cut so as to avoid the steepest parts of the rock, conducted them gently to the summit ; and though it was fearful to look down upon the valley they had quitted, all sense of fear was absorbed in the overwhelming feeling of astonishment at the stupendous scene of savage grandeur and wild magnificence, which presented itself. The sublime and terrific features of this glen, the romantic and picturesque effects of the cata-

racts and falls, which had been viewed in detail beneath, were now spread before them in one vast and unbroken whole.

The last rays of the setting sun still lighted up the highest peaks of the rocks, which shone like so many towering pinnacles of burnished gold, while the middle and lower depths of the glen were softening into grey dusky twilight, when they arrived at the entrance of the cave. How still, how solemn, how awful, was the scene! It reached the better natures of even the rough bosoms which now owned the presence of involuntary feelings awakened by its pensive holiness. All discourse was suspended for awhile. Every eye was fixed with mute, unconscious adoration, upon the impressive signs of the living God; and every mind warmed with natural piety. These sentiments, however, as they were spontaneous, unbidden, unacknowledged, were equally vain and transitory. They came but were not sought; they dwelt with them, a little space, but were not cherished; they fled, and they left no trace behind.

In front of the cave there was a bold projection of the rock which formed a kind of platform, ten or twelve feet square, covered with moss, heath, and other diminutive plants. On this vegetable carpet our wanderers reclined, till the deepening shadows of night reminded them they must prepare their evening repast, and do whatever else required light for its performance. No one seemed disposed to enter the cave, not even Kilvert; and Susan, who could hardly be prevailed upon to let them spread a cloak for her about a foot within the entrance, which was just wide enough to serve as a bed for one person, peeped into her chamber, (when Mayfield and Stephen had arranged it in the best way they could,) but did not seem much disposed to occupy it. Meanwhile, they all seated themselves in a circle round the provision basket, and gave substantial proofs of the good effects of exercise and keen mountain air in creating appetite. Water not being at hand, the stout stone brandy bottle and the keg of Scheidam, were made to yield their unadulterated con-

tents so liberally, that their spirits were soon exhilarated to a jovial pitch. They drank "health and long life to their absent friends at Black Rock,"—"bad luck in this world, and worse in the next, to all their enemies;"—"a hearty welcome to themselves upon their safe arrival at the Devil's Bridge," and "a better one for the day when they should be able to leave it." Stephen warbled an amorous ditty (while squeezing Susan's hand), about "Phillis is my only joy;" and Susan carolled forth in return, "Prythee tell me, faithless Swain." Kilvert, Mayfield, and Three Farthing Nick, trolled the following catch :—

Kilvert. I have no desire here
But to drink good liquor her

Mayfield. Nor I, boy !

Three Farthing Nick. Nor I, boy !

Mayfield. Thou art right, my boy !

Kilvert. And thou, my boy !

All three. Our heads are too airy for plots ;

Let us hug, then, all three,

Since our virtues agree ;

We 'll halloo and cast up our hats !

The rocks and dingles returned in sullen echoes, the iron voices of the choristers when they were all raised with vociferous discord to give due effect to the choral lines, and the hoarse din of the cataracts below formed a not unsuitable accompaniment to the performance. Had any benighted traveller been passing through this lonely glen at the time, he must have been more free than most people from those feelings of superstition which its wild and solitary character was so well calculated to inspire, not to have believed he heard something, which being utterly unlike any sounds of earthly origin, could only have a supernatural one.

Black Kenneth was called upon to contribute his quota to the harmony of the evening; but being almost asleep, he begged to be excused, on the score of a very bad cold. Finding, however, they would have a song, and being master only of one, he gave it, to a dismal air of his own; for never could he have heard such a tune, either in the days of

his "pastoral innocence" or since. It was a choice composition, and ran thus :—

" If any man baulk his liquor
Let him ne'er baulk the gallows :
But sing a psalm there with the vicar,
Or die in a dirty ale-house."

" That song always makes me uncomfortable," observed Three Farthing Nick, when it was over ; " I never hear Kenneth drawl it through his nose, but I think of singing a psalm with the Ordinary."

" We are crank, boys !" exclaimed Kilvert ;
" we are crank, in this our new lodging."

" What's that !" cried Stephen, pointing eagerly to the other side of the glen.

They all turned their eyes, and saw moving along the side of the Mynach, a pale, flickering, spiral flame of bluish light. Sometimes it faintly glimmered through the underwood which fringed the margin, then was lost for a moment in the thick-tangled branches, and then emerged, with a gliding motion, and seemingly increased brightness.

" What is it ?" observed Mayfield, after they

had watched it for a minute or two. "Have you been bred in the country, Squire, and don't know a *Will-with-the-wisp*, when you see it?"

"It is only a Jack-o'-lantern, Stephen," added Susan, laughing.

"You may call it what you please," observed Kilvert, gravely; "but I should be sorry to see the *canwyll gorph* on *this* side of the glen, and finishing its walk at the entrance to our cave. It would stay there, I can tell you, till it lighted one of us to the grave."

"What do you call it?" said Mayfield.

"The *canwyll gorph*, or corpse candle. Whenever it is seen to enter a house, it is certain there will be death there before many days. It remains invisible till the funeral takes place, when it appears again, moves slowly before the coffin to the churchyard, and the moment the body is let down into the grave, vanishes. See! how it keeps walking along, up the glen; I'll be bound if we were to follow it, we should see it creep into

some cottage or other ; for it is a true *canwyll gorph*, and upon a death-errand."

"A true one?" repeated Stephen ; "are there many kinds of them?"

"God bless you!" exclaimed Kilvert, "I can remember, when a boy, trudging over these hills by night, but more frequently in the low places, and seeing walking fires as big as giants; ay, and looking like giants, too, with heads, arms, legs, and bodies; or dancing and flapping about, in the shape of dragons, with wings. I used to think it fine sport to run after them; and many a time I have got up to my knees in a quagmire of peat for my pains."

While Kilvert was speaking, the corpse candle, which was now at a considerable distance, twinkled like a faint spark, and soon after wholly disappeared.

"For my part," said Black Kenneth, smacking his lips as he took them from the bung-hole of the Scheidam, "I wish yon candle which has just gone out, had been pleased to walk

this way ; I would just have lighted my pipe by it."

Thus they sat drinking, singing, and discoursing, till it was nearly midnight, while the moon shone above them in unclouded brilliancy, clothing in its own soft and solemn radiance all those objects which had gradually faded from their sight while seated at their repast. Black Kenneth, already stretched at his length, overcome with fatigue and drink, was enjoying one of those fresco slumbers to which he had been accustomed in the days of his sylvan simplicity. Susan's head rested quietly upon Stephen's shoulder, and she was easily persuaded to retire to her apartment ; only she insisted upon having her bed altered, so that she might lie with her feet towards the inside. Three Farthing Nick provided himself with a couch in the branches of a large beech-tree ; while Mayfield discovered a niche in the rock, where, as he said, "he could roll himself up and get a nap comfortably enough." Stephen, wrapped in a large coat, lay down in

front of the cave, his head and Susan's touching each other at right angles. Kilvert said he should go to roost "when he felt drowsy, on the top of the flight of rock-steps, where there was a smooth round stone which would serve him for a bolster, without which he was sure to have a headach in the morning."

Meanwhile he ascended to his chamber, and seated on the topmost step, surveyed the scene before him—calm, grand, and impressive. It was glorious, it was sublime! Visible effulgence dwelt with beautiful repose on every object. Rocks, trees, groves, the river, and the valley through which it flowed, and the sparkling, leaping cataract, glancing in a thousand fanciful forms, all appeared as if bathed in one streaming flood of transparent yellow mist, or covered with a thin amber-coloured veil, which flung into delicate shadows the ruder features of gigantic nature.

Kilvert gazed—and *wept*! He whom no pang of bodily suffering, no sympathy for others, could touch or move to tears, now shed them like a child; for now the visions of

childhood, dressed in innocence and smiles, swept before him. And there mingled with those visions the memory of a fond mother, of a just and upright father, who would have gone with broken hearts to their graves had they lived to know the dark destiny of their much-loved son. He saw the days of other times, when his troubles were as brief as the summer dew of morning, and his joys pure, light, and fresh, as the morning itself; those days when he trod these mountains and this wild glen, themselves unchanged, but now telling him, in *their* sameness, how he himself was changed.

It was only such a scene, such a moment, such a combination of circumstances, that could have had power to unbind his conscience and set it free; that could have wrenched off the strong fetters which impiety and crime had fastened on it. They were now riven in twain! The solitude of a dungeon; death on the scaffold; all the exhortations of religion, would have failed to awaken the feelings which had thus subdued him. He might have repented;

he might have shook with strong agony to think there was no pardon for him hereafter ; but he could not have wept ; and he would not, as this live-long night he did, bewail the past, shudder at the present, and wish there were not a to-morrow.

CHAPTER XIX.

Bar. Daughter, a word more ; kiss him, speak him fair,
And like a cunning wench so cast about,
That ye be both made sure ere you come out.

————— I say, make love to him :
Do, it is requisite it should be so.

Jew of Malta.

THEY continued in this retreat several months, carefully observing every necessary precaution for guarding against discovery. Such an accident, indeed, was not likely to happen, except through some casual traveller exploring the picturesque scenery of the place, or some shepherd straying thither in quest of cattle that had wandered from the neighbouring pastures ; and in either case, the traveller or the herdsman would probably have been prevented from telling tales.

Black Kenneth was despatched from time to time to Aberystwith to make purchases of a few trifling articles for domestic use ; and by degrees the cave began to assume the appearance of a human habitation. It admitted no daylight ; but a large copper lamp, which was among the first purchases, and suspended from the roof, where they found a thick iron ring and chain already fixed, was kept constantly burning. Fortunately, the weather was warm ; a fire, therefore, could be dispensed with ; else they must infallibly have suffered the inconvenience of cold or partial suffocation, for there did not appear to be any vent for the escape of the smoke. Their predecessors, probably, were of too hardy a temperament to require so effeminate a luxury. Certainly, there were no indications in any part of the cave of a fire ever having been kindled.

The cave itself, as they had surmised on their first visit, was both spacious and lofty ; but whether the work of nature or art, or both, it was impossible to determine. Its form was nearly quadrangular ; and all round there were

small recesses, hollowed out of the solid rock, which looked like the cells of a monastic dormitory. The most convenient of these were used as bed-rooms, after they had undergone the careful cleansing of Susan's huswifery, who was exceedingly apprehensive, during her operations, lest she should discover a heap of old bones in some of them.

Provisions they easily obtained from Aberystwith, in addition to such provender as they not unfrequently brought home, consisting of game, fish, kids, and now and then a fine sheep, shot in mistake, or supposed to have broken its neck in tumbling down a precipice. In short, though living like anchorites, they did not mortify their appetites by either feeding on roots, or drinking water from some limpid fountain. They had money enough for present necessities; but as they were provident of the future, it is doing no injustice to their character to suppose that in their excursions, transfers of property were occasionally made, which would not bear the test of legal inquiry.

As to Susan, she not only soon became reconciled to her mountain home, but after a time, was nearly as expert in treading the craggy paths of the glen as a peasant girl of Mont Blanc, or a chamois hunter of the Tyrolese Alps. She often wandered out alone, when the rest were gone forth at early dawn, and not intending to return till sunset ; but more frequently she was accompanied by Stephen, who sometimes admired, without being able to imitate, the bold springs she would make from ledge to ledge of the rocks over frightful chasms, or the dizzy heights she would ascend where there seemed to be no foothold. It was in these rambles, that the callow love which had been hatched at Black Rock, became full-fledged ; and it was in the cave of the Devil's Bridge, that Susan (like another Dido) and Stephen (like another Æneas), save that they were not storm-driven thither for shelter—But so it was !

Ille dies, primus lethi primusque malorum
Causa fuit.

So it was ! And so it will ever be, as the

innocent Ophelia, with method in her madness, tells us in her wild ditty. Love and murder in this are alike, that they both require—

Thoughts ripe, place fit, will apt, and time agreeing;
Confederate season, else no creature seeing.

So it was — and so Andrew Mayfield expected, and for *his* purposes, *hoped*, it would be. Caitiff as he was, he could not broadly intimate this hope to his own daughter; though on more than one occasion, he had taken care to let her know (by indirect but intelligible language), that paternal displeasure was not among the consequences she would have to dread should it take place; while on all occasions he opened wide the door of opportunity. Nor was it long after it *had* taken place, that reading its confession in Susan's looks, and Stephen's altered manner, he sought from the former a confirmation of his suspicions. It was given.

“It is well,” said the degenerate father; “be discreet in your silence, and leave the rest to me. He marries you at *my* conveni-

ence; and then, happen how else it may, I cannot fail in what I have most laboured for."

And now it was that Mayfield prepared to answer Stephen upon a subject he had hitherto evaded. The remarkable words of Jennet, when, with mingled jealousy and rage, half fury, half sibyl, she declared he would come to the gibbet, but mount the ladder, "a Sir and an Azledine, if Andrew ever called his daughter lady," had often recurred to him. He mentioned them to Mayfield, while on their journey, who treated the matter so lightly, that he dismissed it from his own thoughts. Some expressions, however, which dropped from Susan, in one of their rambles, revived all his former feelings, and he again adverted to it, when Mayfield threw a little mystery into his manner, though still putting him off from the main point. At the same time, he reminded him of what he had frequently said before they left Ashbourne; admitted there *was* a something connected with his future interest, which ere long he might disclose; but significantly hinted, it would depend upon

himself, whether he "was ever to be the better for what it was in his power, and his alone, to do for him."

All these circumstances naturally made Stephen impatient for a full knowledge of the secret (whatever it was), of which Mayfield, it seemed, was the sole guardian; while the latter craftily delayed the communication, in the profligate expectation of that which he considered the desirable preliminary. This, however, was no sooner brought about, than he sought, instead of longer avoiding, another conversation.

He knew it was only necessary to provide Stephen with an opportunity; and for that purpose, one day proposed that they should take their fishing rods, and proceed about two miles up the river, where there was good angling for trouts. As he foresaw, they had scarcely cast their lines upon the stream before he introduced the matter.

"Why, hark you, Squire," said Mayfield, interrupting him, "you and I must have a little talk upon another subject first."

The blood rushed into Stephen's cheeks; for he guessed (so quick is the apprehension of guilt) to what Andrew alluded.

"I don't think you have exactly done the thing you ought," continued Mayfield, with well dissembled sincerity, "in serving poor Susan as you have."

"What do you mean, Andrew?" stammered out Stephen; forcing a laugh at the same time.

"Pooh, pooh — this is all nonsense. You know, well enough, what I mean. I had my fears, I confess, that it might be so; and feeling as a father, I questioned the poor girl, when the truth came out. If I had not looked upon you as a son, almost—I may say quite—for you are as natural to me as one of my own children—I should have taken you somewhat roughly to task about the business, that I can tell you. 'Harm watch, harm catch;' and any other man but yourself doing me such an ill trick, should have answered for it."

"You have got a bite!" exclaimed Stephen, to whom this address was far from entertaining.

“Damn the bite!” said Andrew, giving his rod a jerk which broke the line; and then, while mending it, and baiting the hook afresh, “Old kindness,” he continued, “should not be forgotten, Squire. I have been a good friend to you, since the hour you were born; and though I’m what the world would call a poor man, (and poor enough I am just now, in pocket,) I am not so devoid of proper feelings, as to care nothing for my daughter’s ruin.”

“My dear Andrew,” cried Stephen, in a fit of tender compunction, “what can I do to satisfy you? It is no use, I see, to deny it, and I can’t tell how it happened; but I love Susan, and she loves me; and one day when I seemed to love her more than ever,——”

“Well, well,” interrupted Mayfield, “I can make allowances:—for he that is in love is not his own man, as they say.—Besides—

The water that’s run by, none can recall;
And the hour that is past, is gone for good and all.

There is nothing so bad, however, but
some help is mixed with it. So it may be in

this. It used to delight me to think a day would come, when I should see you take the fairest lady in the land to church. I never dreamed that my Susan would be your wife. But all's one for that : we can but be happy ; and if you love each other, difference of blood need not make difference of estate. For after all,—

When Adam dived and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman ? ”

“ I'll marry Susan, whenever you like,” said Stephen, well pleased to get over an awkward business by what he considered its natural consequence.

“ Spoken like a man of honour,” exclaimed Mayfield ; “ so give me your hand upon it, and we will call that matter settled. My heart is easy, now I know Susan will be made an honest woman.”

“ We can be married at Aberystwith,” continued Stephen, “ and the sooner the better, Mayfield ; for there is no knowing what may happen.”

"No hurry for that, lad," answered Mayfield; "your word's as good as your deed, in my mind; and I'll take care you are made fast before it is necessary. But meanwhile, just for the sake of decency, and to shadow what else were her shame, with marriage rites, Black Kenneth shall perform the office of 'Buckle the beggars,' in the way his father and mother were joined together. This will make her yours in the eyes of our comrades; and when opportunity serves, you may go to church."

Stephen, who was in that complying mood which takes possession of a man who expects to pay a guinea, but finds sixpence enough, assented cheerfully to this plan; the more so, because Susan was not only dear to him, but they had exchanged vows, which he held to constitute a connubial contract scarcely less binding than if they had repeated after the parson.

"What was it that filthy trull said to you, when she was drunk?" inquired Mayfield.

Stephen repeated Jennet's words.

"I suppose you have had your own thoughts

about the creature's meaning; though I'll answer for it they have been wide enough of the mark. But answer me this, lad. How would you like to be owner of a fine house, a large estate, plenty of servants, and more money than you could spend?"

"I wish they would drop from the clouds," replied Stephen; "I'd let you see how I like them."

"What would you say to a man," continued Mayfield, "who saved you the trouble of waiting till they dropped from the clouds?"

"Say!" exclaimed Stephen; with a look which showed he did not think he should be able to say anything; not even "I thank you!"

"What would you say to *me*," pursued Andrew, in a tone of exultation, "if I—I, plain Andrew Mayfield, farmer that was, smuggler, or what you like, that is—were to make a Baronet of you, and instead of Stephen Dugard,—the runaway Stephen Dugard—whom nobody thought worth inquiring after, call you—Sir Stephen Azledine?"

"Why Lord!—you are not serious, An-

drew—you don't mean, I am Sir Everton, do you? Why do you laugh, and look so odd?"

"Give me your hand, lad. I am not Andrew Mayfield—Susan is not my daughter and your wife—that is not the blessed sun which shines above us—if I do not now hold by the hand, and shake by the hand, Sir Stephen Azledine, the rightful heir of Azledine Hall, and the lawful inheritor of the Azledine estates! Now do you understand me?"

Stephen's fishing rod dropped from his grasp and floated down the Mynach. The colour fled from his cheeks—returned; fled again—returned: he trembled and laughed; tears came, and still he laughed; he grasped Mayfield's hands in both his, did everything but speak, yet words were on his tongue, but his tongue had no powers of utterance. At last, springing upon his feet, he danced, snapped his fingers to the motion of his legs, and sung *tol de rol lol, tol de rol lol*, in a voice (like Garri-
rick's statue in Westminster Abbey,) between tragedy and comedy; an indescribable union of laughing and crying at the same moment.

This pantomime of nature continued so long, that Andrew began to think his head was turned. In vain he attempted to make him listen to what he had further to disclose. Stephen capered round and round, sung *tol de rol lol*; and made Mayfield himself join in the dance till he was fairly out of breath. At last, he threw himself exhausted on the ground, and his agitated spirits found relief in a flood of tears.

When he became calm, (if that state of mind might be called a calm which resembled the tossings of the ocean after a tempest,) Mayfield rallied him upon the extravagance of his conduct. Stephen smiled at the description of himself; but the revolution his condition had undergone in a single moment, and the chaos of feelings which that revolution produced, had so bewildered him, that he could neither enter into conversation, nor ask to be informed of the circumstances that had raised him from poverty and self-banishment to affluence and a title.

With the velocity of light, his thoughts tra-

velled through a thousand recollections, a thousand intentions, a thousand resolutions. In imagination, he was already the master of that proud mansion where he had endured taunts, and slights, and rebukes, which still rankled at his heart. He beheld himself the arbiter of their destiny whom he never loved, and some of whom he fiercely hated. Nor was the vulgar triumph slow in presenting itself to his mind, of displaying his greatness, and exercising his power, among the inhabitants of Ashbourne. In his estimation, it was little less than to be a king, to return a Baronet and an Azledine, where hitherto he had been known only as an ambiguous dependent upon the bounty of Sir Everton. These, and a confused crowd of similar ideas, rushed upon him in rapid succession. The only observation he made was in reply to some jocosse remark of Mayfield. He looked at him earnestly, and with a supplicating bitterness of voice, exclaimed — “ Good God, Andrew ! You are not playing me a fool’s trick, all this time, are you ? ” For the moment, Mayfield’s rail-

lery had staggered him ; and the doubt which followed, blasting all the bright realities of his sudden prosperity, was a possible vicissitude that dismayed him.

Mayfield saw it was useless to do anything but fall in with his thoughts, and talk about the manifold things he would do when he took possession of Azledine Hall. In this strain, therefore, their conversation was carried on for two or three hours, amid a profusion of grateful assurances of the wealth which should fall to Mayfield's own share, who listened to them with the quiet consciousness of one who knew that the excellent care he meant to take of himself, would entirely supersede all those kind intentions.

The only promise he exacted, was, that he should keep his own counsel for the present. Kilvert, he said, knew the whole affair, but no one else ; not even his wife, (by which name he now studiously called Susan,) and it would be better that he should let the mat-

ter remain unknown where it was already so. This advice, he promised to follow. But looks and silent manner have a language which proclaims the altered state of a man as plainly as words; and those denotements Stephen had no self-command to hide. He became thoughtful and reserved; yet mingling with his reserve bursts of exuberant gaiety, the sudden impulses of a joy the offspring of secret exultation.

They all noticed the alteration. Kilvert alone surmised, and was afterwards acquainted with, the cause. The rest believed they were equally acquainted with it, when they learned that the nuptials of Stephen and Susan were to be forthwith celebrated by Black Kenneth, which they were two days after, with all the rites and solemnities peculiar to his tribe. Susan had her blushes for the occasion; Stephen his raptures; Black Kenneth his fee; and the whole party their carousal. Kilvert and Three Farthing Nick were the bride-maids. Marriages there doubtless

have been, before and since, more august in ceremony, more stately in attendants; but neither before nor since has there been one surpassing this in—

Midnight shout and revelry,
Topsy dance and jollity.

CHAPTER XX.

————— For the present
I wish a happy blessing to your labours !
Heaven crown your undertakings ! and believe me,
Ere many hours can pass, at our next meeting
The bonds my duty owes shall be full cancelled.
FORD.—“ *The Lover’s Melancholy.*”

WHEN Stephen had satiated himself with meditations upon his coming honours, his thoughts reverted to other circumstances, and particularly to the interval that must elapse ere he could “cast his cloud off, and appear himself.” Meanwhile, seated one Sabbath morning with Mayfield, in a grove of beech trees, on the summit of a rock which overhung the Mynach, he listened to the following strange narrative :—

“ When I was a young man,” said Andrew,
“ I lived in the service of Sir Hildebrand

Azledine, then a young man, too, and much about my own age. He was a fine, spirited, gay gentleman, as bountiful as Providence, and as handsome a creature as ever walked. Had it pleased Heaven to spare his life, Ashbourne would have rejoiced, and every tenant on the Azledine estate; for his only delight was to make people as happy as money could do it. There would have been no poor-house while he lived; and the church steeple would have been repaired long ago. Some folks thought he was not right in his head, because of his many odd ways; but *I* know he was right in his heart, for he wronged nobody, except himself, perhaps: at any rate, his brother, now Sir Everton, (then Squire Azledine,) was the better for some of his odd ways, as you shall hear.

“It was several years after he came of age, I should think six or seven, that he fell in love with Miss Hester Griffiths, whom he met at an assize ball, at Monmouth, where she lived with her mother, a nice old lady, the widow of a lawyer, who left her not less, I

should say, than from a hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds a year, to do what she liked with. Miss Hester was a beautiful girl, or rather young woman, for she was about four-and-twenty ; tall, slim, sweet blue eyes, and the prettiest mouth and teeth I ever beheld. Sir Hildebrand certainly loved her, if ever man loved woman, and I swear there was no love lost between them."

"Did Sir Hildebrand marry her?" inquired Stephen.

"He did not want to marry her," answered Mayfield, "though he wanted to have her. It was a desperate hard struggle between love and pride. She was poor, he was rich ; she was only an attorney's daughter ; he was a Baronet ; she could not look so high as his rank, and he could not look so low as her condition. Besides, he had not sown his wild oats, and did not relish the idea of being tied up from his pursuit of women ; for *that*," continued Mayfield, suddenly altering his tone so as to convey a seasonable hint to Stephen, "*that* was his only fault. However, Miss Griffiths

taught him what every man should be taught, that it must be church first, and bed after ; not bed first, and church when you can catch it. So the upshot of the matter was, the ring was bought, and they became husband and wife. It was quite private,—so private, that I alone knew there was a marriage ; every one else (even her own mother) believing it was an elopement of a different sort. I gave her away. Poor thing ! I often used to pity her, afterwards.”

“ Why ? Did Sir Hildebrand use her ill ? ”

“ Use her ill ! He loved her as the apple of his eye ; and if she could have eaten gold, or slept upon diamonds, she might have done both. No. It was the promise she made him before marriage which caused all her unhappiness after. She consented to keep their union a secret, until Sir Hildebrand himself should think proper to acknowledge her as his wife ; and I was made to take a terrible oath never to divulge it meanwhile. I kept my oath, and she, poor lady ! her promise ; and the con-

sequence was, that very often she was looked upon as no better than she should be, which made her pine and fret. But this was *one* of Sir Hildebrand's odd ways. I remember when he came out of church, his turning round to me, and saying with a smile, 'Now, Mayfield, adieu to Azledine Hall, and the name of Azledine, for five years!' He little thought at that moment he should never see it again!"

"And did he not?" said Stephen.

"Never! I fancy his wish was, by travelling about, and showing his lady the world, to give her a polish. He wrote to his brother, Squire Azledine, who was married, and had two or three children, telling him he might take up his residence at the Hall, with his family; allowed him a considerable addition to his income, out of the estate, (which he was left to manage,) and received for his own use only as much as was necessary to support the character of plain Mr. Durnford. Under that name, he and his lady travelled over a good part of England and Scotland; then went to

Paris, where they lived four or five years; and where *he* was killed, *she* died, and *you*,—you, Squire, were born !”

It was no surprise to Stephen, to find that he was the son of Sir Hildebrand. Preceding circumstances had sufficiently prepared him for it; yet Mayfield’s words went through him like an electric shock. His eyes sparkled, his cheeks became flushed, and an expression of intense joy diffused itself over his whole countenance.

“You say my father was killed,” he observed, in a faltering voice, which might have been mistaken for filial emotion; but it was no other than the feeling inspired by the reflection that his *father* was *Sir Hildebrand*.

“Shot in a duel,” replied Mayfield, “which he fought with an aide-de-camp of the famous Duke of Berwick, who was himself shot a few years afterwards, and as they say, by one of his own soldiers. Sir Hildebrand, I believe, made some insinuations respecting his birth, at a dinner party, where several of his aides-de-camp were present. God knows, however,

what was the real cause; for there were many accounts of the quarrel; though they all agreed in one thing: that Sir Hildebrand said something disrespectful about either the Duke or his father, which one of the aides-de-camp took up, and sent him a challenge. They fought next morning, and my poor master was killed upon the spot—I was going to say—but he lived three hours after. I shall never forget the scene, when he was brought home!”

“Was he sensible?”

“Oh, yes!—as much so as I am at this moment; otherwise, I should not be now sitting here telling you what I am; for he called me to his bed-side, and desiring every one else to leave the room—said to me, ‘Mayfield, you have been a faithful servant, and I rely upon you to fulfil my wishes when I am gone. You alone know of my marriage with my dear Hester. Now attend to my directions. If our dear boy—meaning you, Squire—should live to be one-and-twenty, then, but only then, disclose the secret of his legitimate birth, that he may have his right. Should he die before that

age, let the knowledge of what he might have been die with him ; for, in that case, no wrong will be done to any one, and my memory will not be loaded with the stigma of a falsehood, as I have always denied my marriage to my brother. Take him to England after my death—place him with his uncle—and tell him it was my last request that he would attend to his welfare the same as if he were a child of his own. But remember, Mayfield, should my brother, or any of his family, treat him with unkindness, then no longer conceal the birth ; or should your own life not be spared, I charge you to take care that you do my son right before you leave the world. To your fidelity I commit him, conjuring you, as you hope for mercy in the world to come, that you see him *Sir Stephen Azledine*, if he lives to be of age.’ I fell upon my knees, kissed my dear master’s hand, and promised him I would faithfully perform what he desired. The assurance seemed to give him comfort, and in less than an hour afterwards he breathed his last sigh as quietly as a lamb.”

“ Andrew ! ” exclaimed Stephen, “ I owe you everything ; and when I take possession of Azledine Hall, you shall live there as much master as myself.”

“ Don’t say a word about that, Squire ; I have only done my duty, and I am rewarded—at least I shall be—the day I see you in your own house.”

“ Did my mother live long after Sir Hildebrand ? ”

“ Only a few months. She had been in a very weak state ever since she gave birth to her second child, which was dead-born ; and the shock of Sir Hildebrand’s death hastened her own. Ah, poor lady ! she, too, when she found herself dying, spoke to me very tenderly about you, and made me promise I would see you secured in your lawful rights.”

“ I think I can just remember my mother,” observed Stephen. “ I have a recollection of being taken into a room where there was a lady in bed, who looked very pale, and she kissed me as she put her arms round my neck.”

“ You are right, Squire. She sent for you only a few hours before she died. But to finish this melancholy story. After her burial, I wrote to Squire Azledine, and informed him of what had happened. He replied to my letter, sent me money to settle all claims upon his deceased brother, and desired me, as soon as possible, to return to England. I did so, and took you to Azledine Hall as the *natural son* of Sir Hildebrand. He received you kindly enough, and said you should be called *Dugard*, after some distant relation of the family; but her ladyship, to my thinking, looked upon you, from the first, with an evil eye. However, I left you at the Hall, but resolving not to lose sight of you. Nor did I, as you know; for I should never have turned farmer had it not been that I wished to be upon the spot, to watch how matters went.”

“ And when shall we go to Azledine Hall ? ” inquired Stephen eagerly.

“ Not yet awhile, Squire. We must wait till you are past one-and-twenty; and that you will not be till some months after Midsummer.”

"But why need I wait till then?"

"Why? Because it is the law. You cannot take possession till you are of age."

"Yes," rejoined Stephen, "but I could be doing something; for Sir Everton, when he finds who I am, will of course give up the house and money to me at once."

"What!" exclaimed Mayfield, "do you think I'll go from my promise to my poor master when he was dying? Not for the world! Suppose anything were to happen (and life is uncertain) before you are one-and-twenty? I should expect his ghost would haunt me all the rest of my days for loading his memory with the dishonour of a falsehood."

"Well, but the falsehood *must* come out at last, if I live, and I am hearty enough; so what difference can a few months make? Besides, it is no such great lie after all."

"It is of no use to talk about it, Squire," said Andrew; "I have not been faithful to my oath and promise so many years to perjure myself now."

"I'll give you a thousand pounds, Andrew,"

continued Stephen, "out of the first heap I get, if you'll let the thing be done at once; and I'll settle a thousand a year upon you for life afterwards."

"The thing shall be done when I like, and how I like; and not before, nor in any other manner."

Mayfield's determined tone put an end to all further entreaties on the part of Stephen; and the approach of Susan shortly after, terminated their conversation for the present.

CHAPTER XXI.

Nay, Sir, her estimation's mounted up;
She shall be lady'd and sweet madam'd now.

MARSTON'S *What You Will*.

MAYFIELD, in his narrative, had related much that was true; but he had also suppressed much that was equally true, besides adding some things in which there was no truth.

It was true, for example, that the mother of Stephen resisted all the importunities of Sir Hildebrand to form an illicit connexion with him; but Andrew might also have stated (for he knew the fact), she so deeply resented their repetition, that for three months she refused to receive any letter or communication from him. At length the offence was forgiven; they were married; and the marriage withheld from the knowledge of every one during the time they

were travelling about as Mr. and Mrs. Durnford.

During the same period, too, Sir Everton was allowed to reside at Azledine Hall, managing the estate, and transmitting to Sir Hildebrand such sums of money as he directed. Reports would sometimes reach him that his brother was actually married; but he invariably gave them a positive and public contradiction, upon the authority of Sir Hildebrand himself, who certainly descended to the meanness of a falsehood, from no other apparent motive save that of indulging in a cruel caprice.

The death of Sir Hildebrand was, as Mayfield described, occasioned by a fatal duel which he fought with an aide-de-camp of James Fitz-James, Duke of Berwick; that distinguished and illustrious *Englishman*, of whom France was so justly proud, that one of her writers, speaking of him, says, "What Aristides and Phocion were among the Greeks, what Cato and Brutus were among the Romans, the Duke of Berwick was among the French." The quarrel, however, had nothing to do with

the Duke's birth ; but the conversation turning upon the glory he had acquired at the battle of Almanza, where he gained a signal victory over the allied English, Dutch, and Portuguese troops, Sir Hildebrand expressed unqualified indignation at his bearing arms against his own countrymen, branded him as a traitor, and regretted he had not fallen into the hands of the enemy, that he might have died the death of one.

This imprudent language (the more imprudent because spoken in the presence of two or three aides-de-camp of the Duke) led to the catastrophe which has been mentioned. They made it a common offence, and drew lots which should have the honour of challenging the insolent Englishman. Sir Hildebrand, hearing of this when he arrived on the ground, told them, with an intrepidity which won their admiration, that as it seemed he had given them all offence, he was prepared to give them all satisfaction. It happened, however, that the encounter with his first antagonist proved fatal, whose sword went through his heart,

and he fell dead upon the spot. Andrew, indeed, lengthened his life three hours ; but that was to put into his mouth a dying speech, which might plausibly account for his having so long concealed the secret of Stephen's legitimacy.

The death of his wife followed a few months after, partly accelerated by the shock of her husband's melancholy fate ; but the condition of her health was such, (owing to a severe accident during her pregnancy, which caused the child to be dead born,) that the most skilful physicians had pronounced her life in imminent danger. She herself, however, did not apprehend its termination to be so near ; and was only waiting to gain sufficient strength to bear the fatigue of the journey to England, when a sudden change brought on speedy dissolution. Before her death, she wrote a letter to Sir Everton, declaring her marriage with Sir Hildebrand, enclosing the certificate of it, and earnestly recommending her infant son to his protection ; this letter she intrusted to Mayfield.

It was then he conceived the project he afterwards executed, though it is doubtful whether in the first instance it embraced all the objects that subsequently presented themselves. Kilvert, as the reader may remember, was in Paris at the time, and to him he confided his designs; they had his immediate approbation; not so much from any notion that he himself either could or would be benefited by them, as from a simple love of knavery, an innate fondness for anything that smacked of fraud.

By the deaths of Sir Hildebrand and his lady, Mayfield saw himself the sole depositary of an important secret; and his single consideration was how he could make it serve his own dishonest ends. He had reason to believe Sir Everton was too just and honourable to purchase his silence; and that the moment he knew Stephen was the legitimate heir, he would consider himself merely as his guardian to administer the property till he was of age. He weighed this long in his mind, but could not satisfy himself it would be safe to attempt the negotiation.

He resolved, therefore, to let events take their course. If Stephen died, well and good ; if he lived, then, at the proper time, he should be able to make his market by the power he would have of putting him into the possession of his lawful rights. Meanwhile, he determined to hover about the heir, and to acquire an influence over him by every means he could employ. This, as has been seen, he accomplished ; but in which he was greatly assisted by the natural dispositions of Stephen. It was not till after he turned farmer that he enlarged his schemes, and saw the possibility of bringing about a marriage between him and his daughter. From the moment he did see it, however, his whole thoughts and all his plans were directed towards it.

He was aware that a marriage contracted while Stephen was under age might be annulled ; he was equally aware, too, that, as Stephen approached manhood, it would be desirable to have him completely in his power. Hence his constant caution that he should be apprised of any intention to remove him from

Ashbourne; hence his pretended alarm lest he should be sent to one of the West India islands; and hence the contrivance with Kilvert for conducting him to Black Rock.

In this contrivance he craftily aimed at another object. He knew the sort of life to which he would be there inured; and the less he was fitted by previous habits and society for assuming the rank and wealth which awaited him, the more he would be inclined to take both upon such conditions as he himself might impose. In the circle at Black Rock, too, his own daughter would be peerless. The rest might be left to nature.

That Mayfield had conducted his plans with consummate craft as well as daring, their complete success, up to the period we are describing, is the best proof. He was never, at any time, thrown off his guard. When relating to Stephen the circumstances of his mother's marriage, he took care not to mention the church, (the little parish church of the beautiful village of Landogo, on the Wye, in Monmouthshire) a fact which, had

it escaped him, and Stephen had remembered, would have let at least one weapon out of his hand. So, too, when Stephen was urgent for the adoption of immediate steps towards declaring him the heir of Azledine Hall, after he found fictitious reasons for delay of no avail, he gave a peremptory refusal.

The letter which Sir Hildebrand's lady had entrusted to him, he withheld, but did not destroy. It, and its enclosure, would be important documents whenever he might need them. Before he quitted Paris, too, he obtained a copy of the registry of Stephen's birth; and thus, with his own knowledge of his identity, he considered the chain of evidence complete.

Upon his arrival in England, Sir Everton befriended him in consideration of what he believed to have been his faithful services to his brother; services which Andrew did not fail to magnify, so long as they were recognised as a sufficient passport to the Baronet's liberality. After a time, however, this liberality contracted its stream, because Sir Everton

began to discover that instead of fertilising industry, it was employed merely as its substitute.

Then it was that Mayfield first ventured to insinuate darkly the power he had of bettering his condition ; but never in a way that could lead Sir Everton to suspect the real truth. What he always inferred from these insinuations was, that if Andrew's necessities were not relieved, he would either perjure himself or suborn others, so as to raise a plausible question touching Stephen's legitimacy, which he should not be able to set at rest without much trouble and great expense.

In this manner he worked upon the irresolute, quiet-loving character of Sir Everton, who, while he believed every fresh demand would be the last, resolved, after every one, that the next, if there were another, should find him firm in resisting it. Yet we have seen how this resolution was maintained when Black Kenneth appeared as Mayfield's representative. The second letter, with which he was provided, contained nothing more than one of those vague menaces, which had so often been found effec-

tual. Latterly, indeed, the Baronet began to discern the precise nature of the system, and to grow weary of it; but Mayfield was then beyond his reach.

His schemes, however, though so near maturity, seemed for a time to be impeded by circumstances which threatened to defeat them altogether. It was some months after his conversations with Stephen, and when they had removed from their autumnal residence to a decent habitation near Aberystwith, that a striking change, both towards himself and Susan (but especially the latter), began to display itself. There was no longer the same ardent wish that the church marriage should take place. The gipsy one seemed to satisfy him; and every time he talked upon the subject of his future situation, it was with an increasing and even resentful impatience of what he considered the unnecessary delay. The embryo Baronet, too, was beginning to loosen the links that held him to his present associates, as if he thought he *could*, by ceasing to be one of them, cease to be responsible for

his share of the many acts in which he had had a guilty participation. He had yet to learn that the bonds which link confederates in crime, however fragile they may be for mutual protection, are bonds of adamant in fastening them to one common fate in the hour of retribution.

Mayfield penetrated at once the secret workings of Stephen's mind ; for he had all along foreseen their extreme probability, and shaped the whole course of his proceedings with reference to them. Like a magician, who spreads a costly banquet, but holds the potent wand which can dissolve it into nothing if the conditions upon which it is offered be refused, so Mayfield had shown Stephen the tempting feast ; but guarded by a spell, which he alone could remove, while, until it *was* removed, he could not eat.

Here, however, the comparison ceased : for Andrew, unlike the wizards of necromantic legends, was the slave of his own charms, and if Stephen could not eat, neither could he himself. It was the more necessary, therefore, he

should remove every impediment ; and hence he determined to have a decisive explanation upon the extent of his power, and the unalterable use he was resolved to make of it.

The task was not difficult ; for when Stephen, confessing his impatience, hinted, that if Andrew was fixed in his intention of waiting till he was one-and-twenty, he would himself write a letter to Sir Everton, stating all he now knew concerning his birth, Mayfield fastened his eyes upon him with a look of contemptuous indignation, and thus addressed him :—

“ Write your letter, Squire ; and when it is finished, I will myself add a postscript, confirming all you say ; and the same hour it is despatched, you shall see me thrust these papers (taking a small packet from his pocket) into the fire. Why, how now ? Do you think I have been fifteen years nursing an inheritance for you, and have not had wit enough to look after my own share of it ! Am I in *your* power, or you in *mine* ? You will write to Sir Everton, and tell him all ! Have you be-

thought you to what that *all* amounts? That you are the son of Sir Hildebrand. He knows you are. Oh! but you are his legitimate son. Ay, indeed! who knows *that*, myself excepted? *You*, to be sure, can *tell* him Sir Hildebrand was married to your mother; and you can *tell* him that this marriage took place somewhere in the British dominions; and that you were born somewhere in France,—Paris, as you have heard;—and you can assure him, that you *are* the son, and the *only* son, of this marriage; and upon hearing all these wonders, Sir Everton, no doubt, will immediately walk out of Azledine Hall, and you will walk into it, Sir Stephen! I wish you joy of the title and fortune that await you; but when you get them, I'll give you leave to laugh at silly Andrew Mayfield, who thought *he* was the one to help you to them."

Stephen writhed under these galling taunts; and Mayfield, who saw it, rejoiced in the opportunity of making him feel that he was his master.

"I did not expect," he continued, "after

you had abided by my advice in so many things, you would set me at defiance just when the harvest was ready for the sickle. However, since it is so, you must take the consequences, Squire. I don't care one straw, which way the thing goes. It will neither shorten my days nor cloud them, if I go out of the world as poor as I came into it. It is not I who might be a Baronet and will not; who might have thousands, and choose to make shift with an odd guinea when I can get hold of it. And as to Susan, she will be none the less happy, I dare say, because she is the wife of Stephen Dugard only, instead of sharing with you a title and a fortune. I may almost say I am better pleased that matters are likely to turn out this way; for then, neither you nor the world can pretend I made you marry her (as I intend you *shall*, and that forthwith,) for the sake of your money."

"We are as good as married already," observed Stephen, sullenly; "and I don't see any occasion for another marriage."

"Don't you?" exclaimed Mayfield; "then

let me advise you to set about making the discovery immediately. By G—d, Squire!" he continued, with no affected wrath, "if I thought you meant to play Susan false, and to fool me, in that particular, the words of Jennet should be fulfilled; ay—even though myself, Kilvert, and all our brave fellows, hung on the same gibbet with you like dogs! Revenge is sweet—and to wreak it upon one villain, I would strike through the hearts of half a dozen honest men. Understand me to mean what I say; for upon this point, I swear you shall have no choice but between the gallows and doing right to an injured girl. As to the other matter, I would not hold up my finger, to stop you from doing what you like. There is no law in England can make you Sir Stephen Azledine without these papers and my evidence; and the first step you take against my wishes, I destroy the one, and leave you to get at the other as you can."

Stephen's blood ran cold as Mayfield uttered this fearful menace. It was not for him to balance probabilities, or ask himself was it

likely he would execute his threat. There was a naked terror in the threat itself, which chained his will to that of Mayfield. He was humbled in a moment ; submissive as a slave. With a quivering lip he assured Andrew he never seriously intended to act otherwise than in obedience to him, renewed all his professions of gratitude, and offered to bind himself in any way he chose, to his promise of marrying Susan. Andrew, whose interest it was to be forgiving, easily yielded to these penitential vows and recantations, and from that moment, whatever might be Stephen's secret intentions, not a word escaped that could disturb his confidence.

It has been mentioned that our fugitives had abandoned their mountain cave and taken up their abode in a house near Aberystwith. Here, Three Farthing Nick was unanimously voted a Yorkshire gentleman of small fortune who wished to pass a few months in retirement ; the others being his particular friends who had accompanied him, though with no intention of remaining the whole time. But the

“Yorkshire gentleman and his friends at Oak-tree Farm” (which was the name of the tenement they occupied) soon began to be looked upon “as queer sort of folk,” in spite of all their efforts not to appear so; and many strange stories grew current respecting them. Some declared they were Jesuits; some that they were conspirators, and had come there to bring in the Pretender; while others, who suspected they were coiners, looked narrowly at every piece of money which was known to come from Oak-tree Farm. As they paid their way, however, and interfered with nobody, it was not considered anybody’s business to interfere with them.

Here they continued to live, partly ignorant of the curiosity they excited, and wholly indifferent to that which they did know, till the time arrived when Mayfield could complete his long projected schemes. Stephen attained his one-and-twentieth year; and a journey to London was to be undertaken by him, Andrew, and Susan. Kilvert alone knew its real object. Susan, who believed she was only going to be

duly married, wondered why she need travel two hundred miles for that purpose, when there was a parish church close at hand. Black Kenneth and Three Farthing Nick understood that the expedition was for the purpose of ascertaining what had happened since their flight from Black Rock, and whether the affair of the two witnesses had blown over. They wondered, therefore, why Stephen and Susan accompanied Mayfield, but supposed it might be his intention to celebrate his daughter's nuptials by a Fleet marriage.

The reader need hardly be informed that Andrew's business in London was to consult a lawyer; or rather, to place in a lawyer's hands the necessary evidence for establishing Stephen's claim to the Azledine estates, and employ him to take the usual steps for giving effect to his claim. There was a very eminent attorney, (they were not called solicitors in those days,) one Mr. Grabhim, who had been entrusted with the management of Sir Hilde-

brand's affairs; and Mayfield justly considered he would be the most fit person to conduct this business.

Upon their arrival in London, however, Mayfield visited Doctors' Commons before he sought out Mr. Grabhim; and a licence being procured, Stephen and Susan were united in holy wedlock, at St. Giles' in the Fields, by the names and additions of Sir Stephen Azledine, Bart. and Susan Mayfield, spinster. Stephen was so overjoyed at the near approach of his intoxicating triumphs, that he had no place in his mind for a single thought as to the irrevocable step he had taken; while Mayfield, as he retired from the church by the side of his now Lady-daughter, felt as a man may be forgiven for feeling, who sees long years of labour and contrivance crowned at last with complete success.

His next care was, to wait upon Mr. Grabhim, who listened with amazement and incredulity to his statement. There was too much *prima facie* evidence, however, to permit him

to hesitate. He undertook the case; pledged himself, if the matter turned out as represented, that the unexpected heir should soon be put into possession of his hereditary rights; and directed Mayfield to call again in about a week, by which time he should have made the necessary preliminary inquiries.

It so chanced, that Mr. Grabhim had been employed by Aston's father to draw up the marriage settlement between his son and Arabella. The moment, therefore, he became acquainted with the pretensions of Stephen, he considered it his duty, as an honest lawyer, to acquaint his client with the fact, concealing names for the present, and giving no opinion as to the probability or otherwise of the alleged claim proving valid.

Mr. Aston, who had consented that his son should marry the daughter of a Baronet, suitably portioned, felt no disposition to continue his sanction when the lady was likely to be stripped at once of descent and dowry. Hence a trusty messenger was

despatched immediately to Azledine Hall, who arrived, as the reader knows, just in time to overwhelm the bride and bridegroom with sorrow, and the whole family with amazement.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON :

**PRINTED BY SAMUEL BENTLEY,
Bangor House, Shoe Lane.**



32101 063693475

v.2

